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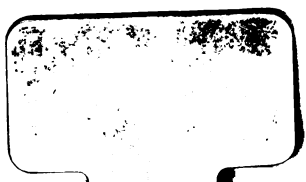
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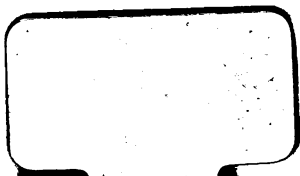


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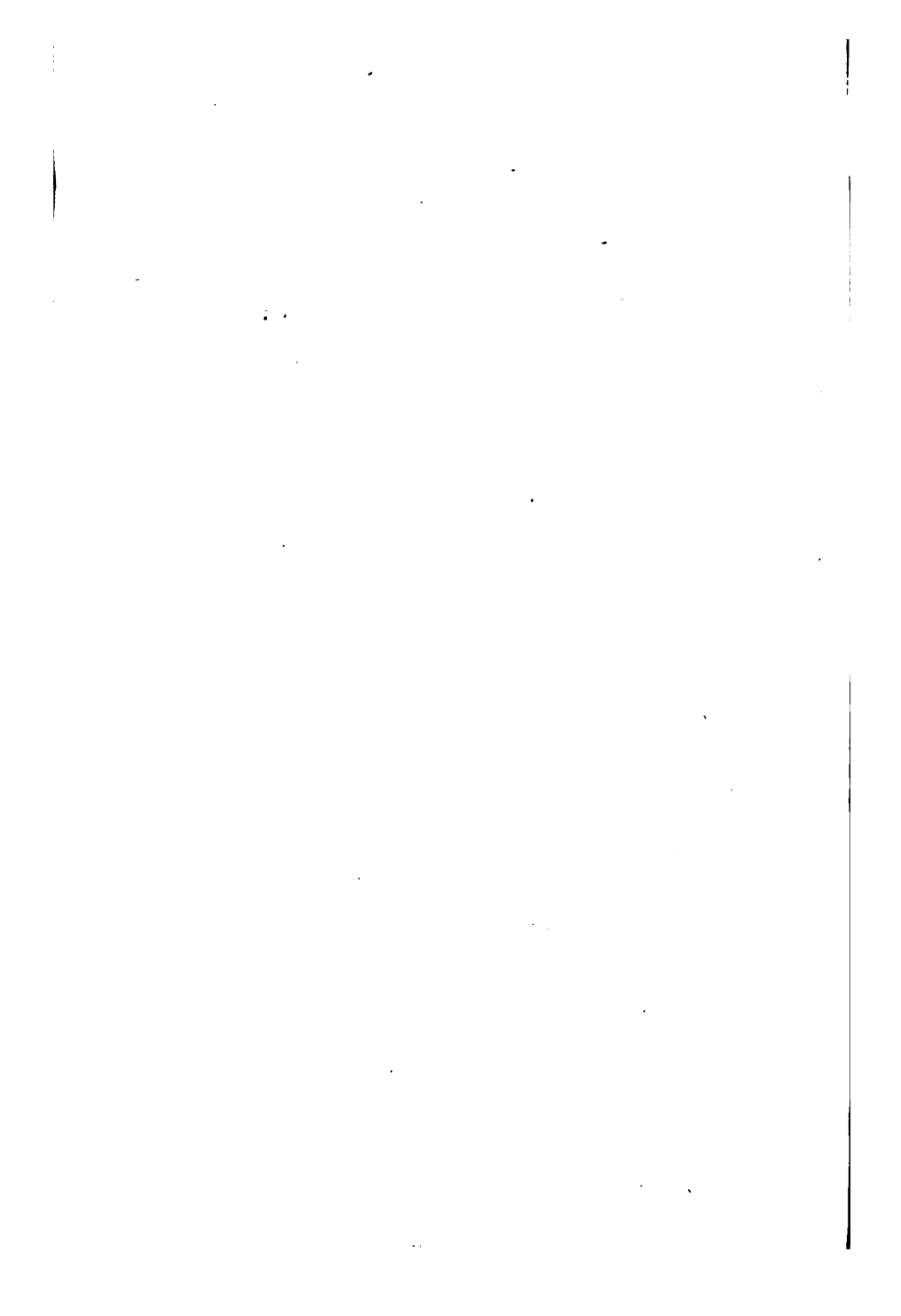




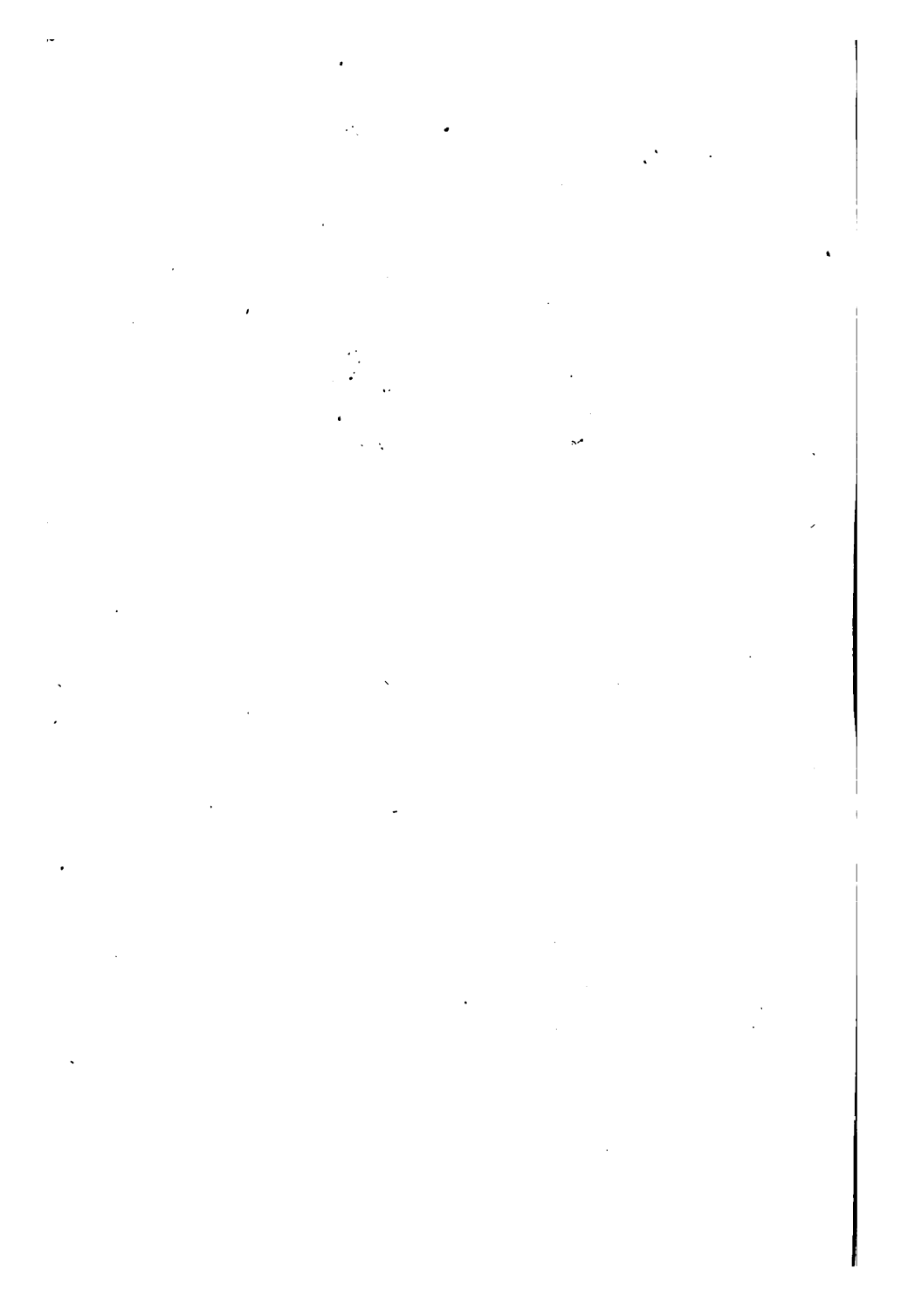
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JOHN HOLDSWORTH: CHIEF MATE.



JOHN HOLDSWORTH: CHIEF MATE.

A Story, in Three Vols.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "JILTED."

"No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail: for being in a ship is being in a jail with the chance of being drowned."—*Dr. Johnson.*

VOL. I.

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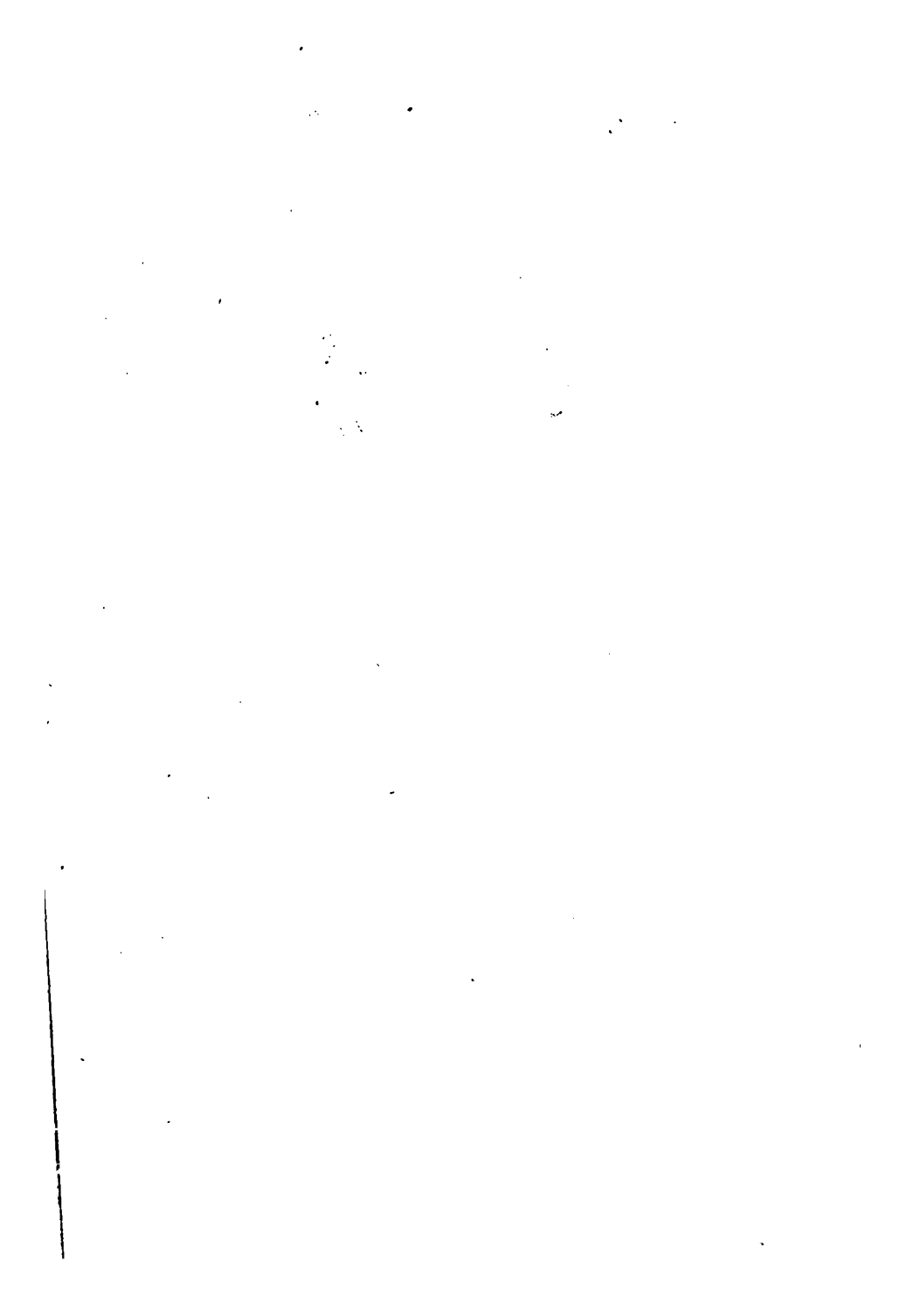
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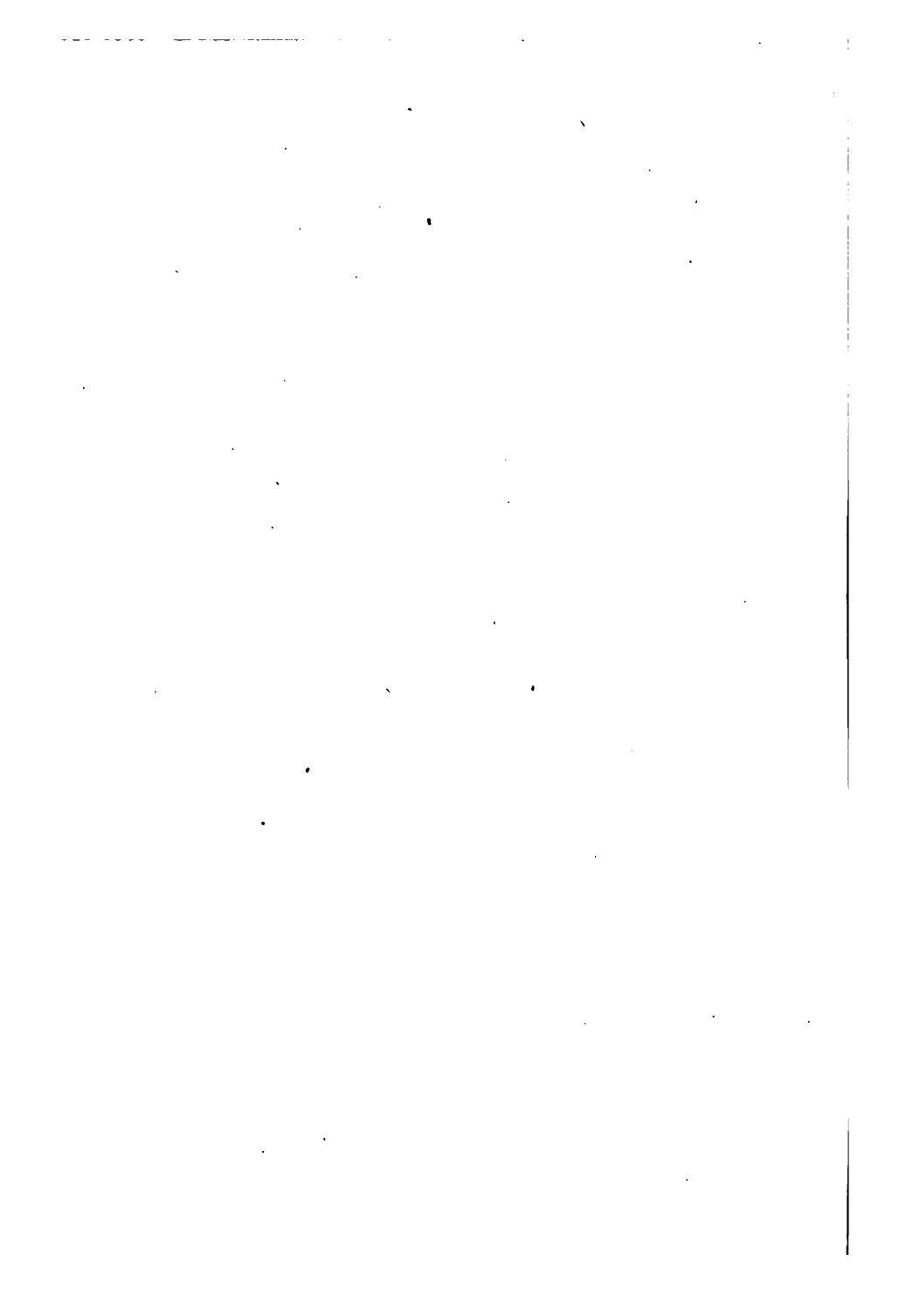
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JOHN HOLDSWORTH: CHIEF MATE.

CHAPTER I.

SOUTHBOURNE.

IN a period of English history which gray-beards call the good old times—the fine old times; that is to say, when Parliament was horribly corrupt, and the Poor Laws as barbarous as the Inquisition; when it took fifteen hours to go from London to Dover; and when at least one-half of the conveniences which we now very reasonably call the necessities of life had no existence—

Southbourne was a small straggling village,

and, by reason of the quaint and primitive aspect of its houses, something, even in those good old times, like an anachronism on the face of the land. What is now a well-looking street, fairly paved, and decorated with a number of showy shop-windows, was then an uneven road, with great spaces of grassy land, dusty and closely nibbled by goats, between the houses; whilst the houses themselves were mostly gable-roofed, with latticed windows, which served excellently to exclude the light, and which gave a blank and lack-lustre look to the edifices, as though they were weary to death of the eternal sameness of their objectless existence.

Yet, in spite of its architectural deformities, Southbourne was such a place as would weave its homely interests about a man's heart, and be present to his mind

when gay and splendid scenes were forgotten. At the very entrance of the village, as you went into the street out of the dusty London Road, stood the King's Arms Inn, a long, low-built, white-faced tavern, with a great signboard hung flag-wise over the doorway, which, when the wind was fresh, would swing with hoarse outcries, as though urging the distant wayfarer to make haste and enjoy the welcome that was to be obtained, for a few pence, from the stout, well-fed host who presided within. Opposite this tavern stood a decent farmhouse, its thatched roof black with time, begirt with walls and palings, within which, when the mowing moon was high, great stacks of hay would rear their gold-coloured sides, and make the air as sweet as the smell of new milk. And all about this pleasant farmhouse were apple and cherry

trees, under whose shadows a vast family of cocks and hens held the day, eternally busy with their voices; while pigs in unseen sties grunted their hungry discord, and did their lazy best to drown the mournful cooing of doves in wicker cages, and the cheerful notes of the birds, who were attracted in countless numbers to the farmyard.

Between these two houses ran what the villagers called the High Street; and the eye followed the road, patched here and there with dark-coloured grass, for nearly a third of a mile, noting the gable-roofed houses that looked at each other from either side; the blacksmith's shed, where the bellows were always roaring; the flat-roofed baker's shop, standing importunately forwards, away from the little house in which the baker lived; the butcher's hard by; the apothecary's

next to that; and the linendraper's shop, which had absorbed the frontage of no less than two solemn-looking houses—noting these and other details contributing to the carnal or frivolous interests of the place, until it settled upon a small building, which, standing in the centre of the road, narrowed it into a large and a small lane, and thus marked the extent and importance of the High Street.

Our story opens on a summer's evening. The daylight is still abroad upon the distant hill-tops, but the twilight has fallen like an inaudible hush upon Southbourne, and the farmyards are tranquil, save when, now and again, some uncomfortable hen seeking a resting-place near to her sovereign cock hops for his perch, but in hopping falls and awakens the sleepers with her fluttering scrambles and keen notes of

distress, echoed by a hundred wondering throats.

The evening is warm, and many of the house doors are open; and at these open doors sit, here and there, men in their shirt-sleeves, or in homely smocks, smoking long pipes, and addressing each other from across the road with voices bespeaking laborious thought, which demands many reflective puffs to clarify and adjust. Now the apothecary's boy comes out and lights the coloured lamp over the door, while the apothecary within sets two wax candles against his brilliant globes of lustrous dyes and illuminates the darksome roadway with a crimson and a yellow gleam. Now the linendraper's assistant steps forth and puts up the shutters to his master's windows, whilst the master himself struts along the floor, flapping his counter with a dust-brush,

and inhaling the appetising perfume which streams from an inner room, and which is the best assurance he could demand that his supper is preparing. Anon comes a lame man, armed with a ladder, a lanthorn, and a can of oil at his girdle; he sets the ladder against a lamp-post, and in five minutes' time succeeds in kindling a faint uncertain light in the darkling air. Thrice does he perform this laborious duty, and then, lo! the High Street is illuminated.

These lights seem to act as signals for sundry groups of gossips, standing here and there along the dusty road, to disperse. The small cackle of talk, like the click of wheels driven against springs, ceases; the old hobble towards the houses, the young follow yet more leisurely; the gloom deepens; one by one the doors are closed and little yellow lights twinkle mistily upon

the latticed windows. And now, though the clock of St. George's Church has not yet tolled the half-hour past eight, one may easily see that the good village of Southbourne, with one eye upon the candles, costly at sixteenpence the pound, and another eye upon the early hour that is to expel it from its slumbers into the fields and the workshops, is making what haste it can to creep with heavy eyelids into bed.

In the house that looks askant down the road and breaks the thoroughfare into lanes, there is a sorrow at work that should seem absolutely inconsistent with the serenity and peace of the summer evening outside.

Three persons are seated in a cosy room ; a tall lamp on a table sheds a soft light upon the walls ; the window is open, and the large tremulous stars look in through

the branches of the elms which front the little building. How sweet is the smell of the clematis about the window! and see, a great black moth whirrs towards the lamp and occupies the silence with its vigorous slaps against the ceiling.

The old woman in the high-backed chair, looking down upon her placid hands, is a perfect picture of handsome old age: hair white as snow; a sunken cheek touched with a hectic that passes well for, if, indeed, it be not, the bloom of health; a garrulous under lip; a mild and benevolent expression. She is dressed in an antique satin gown, and a fine red silk handkerchief, as large as a shawl, is pinned about her shoulders.

Facing her sits a young man, broad-shouldered and bronzed, with large lustrous black eyes and dark wavy hair. He wears a pilot cloth coat and black trousers, bell-

mouthed at the feet, and a plain silver ring upon his left hand.

Close beside him, on a low chair, sits a young girl, with a sweet and modest face, and bright yellow hair which shines in the lamplight like gold, and blue eyes filled now with tears.

So they sit, so they have sat, for many minutes in silence, and nothing is heard but the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, or the awkward moth that hits the ceiling, or now and again the melancholy plaint of some dreaming or belated bird from the dark country that stretches outside like a vision under the throbbing starlight.

Presently the old lady, lifting her head, says :

“I don't think it pleases God that people's hearts should be sorrowful.

Nothing should grieve us but the fear of His anger ; and if there be truth in religion, and any wisdom in human experience, there is nothing in this world that should make us sad."

The girl presses her hand to her eyes, and answers in a broken voice :

"John and I have never really been parted before."

"We never can be parted, Dolly, my sweet little wife," says the young man. "There was a fear of parting before, but none now, dear one. I am only leaving you for awhile—and that is not parting, is it, grandmother ? Parting is separation, and those whom God has joined cannot be parted, cannot be parted, my Dolly !"

"Ay, that is right !" exclaims the old lady. "John is only leaving you for awhile—you cannot be parted—remember that."

"But it is to be a long while, and my heart will be so lonely without him, granny."

The old lady gives her head a dispirited shake.

"It is all going and coming in this world," says she. "To-day here, to-morrow there : 'tis like breathing on a mirror."

"No, no !" cries the young fellow, "that is a melancholy simile. Life is something more than a breath. I would be content to know nothing but its sorrows, rather than think it the hollow illusion people call it. Oh, Dolly, you must cheer up and help to give me heart. I want all the courage I can get. After this voyage we needn't be separated any more. Remember, next year I shall be skipper, and then I can take you to sea with me."

"If next year had only come !" the poor

little girl sobs, and lets her face fall upon her husband's hand.

“Nay, nay,” the old lady chides, gently, “’tis thy business to help and support thy husband, Dolly. Will tears help him? Resolution is softened by them, and made weak and womanish. Your mother before you, my child, knew what it was to part from your father. He once went to Spain, and for many months we knew not whether he was living or dead. You were a little child then. What came to her, came to me, and must come to you as it comes to all women who will needs transplant their own hearts into men’s. Know this, Dolly, that no love is purely sweet that has not known trials and afflictions.”

“Hear that, my little one,” says the young husband, stooping his head until his lips touch his wife’s ears. “Let us

seek a blessing in our grief, and we shall find one. It teaches me to know my love for you—our love for each other. Is not such knowledge blessed ?”

“See here, Dolly,” continued the grandmother, battling with the tears provoked by the influx of hurrying memories which followed her reference to her own child, Dolly’s mother. “When John is gone, we will put up a calendar against the wall in your bedroom ; and every night, after we have worshipped God, we will prick off a day, and you shall see how quickly the calendar grows small under our hands. I am seventy years old, and it was but the other day that I was dancing your mother in my arms, and I was a young woman, and your grandfather a hearty man, with brown hair under his wig, and bright big eyes like

yours. Why, that was fifty years ago, and it seems but yesterday ! Many's the bitter tear I have shed, and the grief I have borne ; but the times *I* mourn cannot come back to me, they are gone for ever—my life is but an empty chamber now ; there is no fire in the grate, and the chairs are vacant, and I feel so lonely that I sometimes wish I was dead. But what is your grief ? It is but a few months' separation, and every day that dies will give you happiness. It is not so with others, nor with me—no ! no !”

As the old grandmother spoke, with some perception, perhaps, of that rather discreditable characteristic of human nature which finds the best solace for its own trouble in the consolation that is wrought out of the griefs of others, the girl gradually raised her head and fixed her eyes

wistfully on her husband's, then laid her cheek against his shoulder, as a child would whom its tears have worn out.

"Grandmother," said the young man, "I leave my Dolly to your care, and I know you will love and cherish her as though you were sure that any ill that came to her would break my heart."

"She cannot be dearer to me than she always was," answered the old lady, solemnly; "but be sure, John, that I'll take extra care of her, since her preciousness is doubled by being dear to you and having your life bound up in hers."

"And you will keep her heart up with happy thoughts of me, grandmother," continued the young fellow, his dark eyes made infinitely tender by the shadow of tears, "and bid her remember that when the wind blows here it may be a summer

calm where I am, and blue sky when there are thunderstorms here. You'll remember this, Dolly?"

"Yes, John."

"The calendar is a good thought of grandmother's. Or you may watch the flowers, Dolly; you'll see them fade away and leave the ground bare. By-and-by they'll spring up again, and they will be a promise that I am coming back to you—coming quickly—quick as the wind will blow me—back to my little wife, to my sweet wife, Dolly."

She sobbed quickly with renewed passion, and clasped his hand.

There was a childlike beauty in her face that made her sorrow infinitely touching for him, who loved her with all the strength of his great heart, to behold. He looked wistfully at the old grand-

mother; but she, more powerless than he, was brooding over the to-morrows which were to come when he should have gone away and left her alone with Dolly's grief.

"I have a mind," she said at last, "to send for Mr. Newcome, the rector. He should be able to point out to Dolly better than either of us can, that there is something unrighteous in suffering our hearts to be overcome by any dispensations God in His wise providence may choose to ordain."

"No, I don't want Mr. Newcome," sobbed Dolly. "I must cry, granny. When John is gone, I'll dry my eyes, and think of nothing but the time when he is to come back to me. But whilst I see him, and know that this time to-morrow he will be gone, I can't help crying, indeed I can't, granny."

"Ay, my dear, but if your tears could bind him to you, and take the place of his duties which summon him away, they would be very well. But it is your place to help him in his troubles, as it is his to help you in yours; and see what a lonesome air his face has as he watches you, because he feels himself away from you by your refusing to listen to the words he tries to comfort you with."

"I would give my right hand to save Dolly from these tears, grandmother," said John, "but it is her love that frets. By-and-by her eyes will grow bright, for she will know that every hour which passes after I have left her is bringing us nearer to next summer, when we shall be together again."

"But a year is such a long time," wailed Dolly. "It is four times over again the

months we have been together, and it seems ages ago since you came home, John. And granny doesn't know the dangers of the sea. You have never talked to her as you have to me. Haven't you told me of shipwrecks, and how men fall overboard, and how some ships catch fire and not a creature saved of all a great ship's crew?"

"Yes, Dolly," he answered, smoothing her bright hair; "but I have always said that the sea isn't more dangerous than the land. There's danger everywhere for the matter of that, isn't there, grandmother?"

"Oh dear yes," groaned the old lady; "there are deaths going on all about us, on the dry land, quick as our pulses beat."

"Ay, true enough, grandmother," rejoined John; "more deaths are going on ashore than are going on at sea. But why

do we talk of death? People part and meet again—why shouldn't we? There is no end to trouble if once we begin to think of what *may* happen. A man should put his trust in God—"

"Yes, that first, that chiefly," interrupted the grandmother.

"And fight his way onward with as much courage and hope and resolution to win as though there were no such thing as death in the world at all. When I bid you good-bye, Dolly, I shan't say good-bye, *perhaps for ever*; no! no! I will say good-bye till next summer. Summer is sure to come, and why shouldn't it bring me back?"

"We will pray God that it will," exclaimed the grandmother.

Thus these honest hearts talked and

hoped ; but, in truth, the parting was more bitter than Dolly could bear.

On this, the eve of her husband's leaving her, she could see no promise in time, no sunshine in the long and dismal blank that stretched before her. She was quite a young bride, had been married only three months ; but his presence had already become a habit to her, a portion of her life, a condition of her happiness.

She had engaged herself to him eighteen months since, not many weeks before he sailed on his last voyage ; but though she had learnt to love him tenderly as her sweetheart, his going did not then afflict her as it now did. He was only her lover then, but now he was her husband. She was ardent when she became his wife, flushed with the sweet and gracious emotions of her new state, and because the thought

of the approaching time threw a shadow upon her happiness, she drove it deep down in her heart, out of sight almost, and so unfitted herself for bravely encountering the certain trouble that was to come.

It had come now ; its full weight was upon her ; she thought it must break her heart.

When we found them, they had not long returned from the last walk they were to take together for many a weary month ; and it was so bitterly sad to them both, that no words can express its pathos. They were surrounded by familiar and beloved objects ; and every detail that had heretofore made up the colour and life of their married love now came, each with its special pang of sorrow, to tell them that their dream was dissolved, and that their embraces, their whispers—indeed

their very hopes—must be postponed until a period so far off, that it seemed as if no time would ever bring it to them. The poor fellow did his utmost to inspirit her; all the unsubstantial comfort he strove to lay to his own heart he gave to her; but his broken voice made his cheery assurances more sad even than her tears; and down by the little river, when the evening had gathered, and the soft stars were looking upon them, he had given way to his grief, and wept over her as if the form he pressed to him were lifeless.

The story of his courtship and marriage was as simple as the pastoral life of the village in which it occurred.

He had been called to Southbourne by his aunt, who lived there, and who felt herself dying. He had then just returned from a ten months' voyage. He was fond

of his aunt, as the only living relative he had, and came to her at once. At her house—indeed, by her bedside—he met Mrs. Flemming, Dolly's grandmother. Mrs. Flemming took a fancy to him, admired his handsome face, his honest character, the cordial tenderness of his nature, which he illustrated by his devotion to his sick aunt, and asked him to her house, where he met Dolly.

He fell in love with her ; and then, but not till then, he found that Southbourne was an infinitely better place to live in than the neighbourhood of the West India Docks.

Dolly was an innocent little creature, and hardly knew at first what to make of the love she had inspired in her grandmother's young friend ; but by degrees the old story was read through between them,

and the last chapter found them betrothed with Mrs. Flemming's full consent.

Meanwhile, the aunt had died and left her little savings to her nephew, who gave the money to Mrs. Flemming to take care of for him until he came home. He was then chief mate, aged twenty-eight. When thirty he was to command a ship, his employers promised. So when he returned, twenty-nine years old, with only another year before him to serve out as a subordinate, he claimed Mrs. Flemming's leave to marry Dolly ; and within three weeks from the time of his arrival they were man and wife.

There could be no hitch : there was nobody's leave, but Mrs. Flemming's, to get. He and Dolly were both of them orphans. Her parents had died when she was a little girl ; his, some years before this story

begins. His father had been skipper in the service John belonged to, and the shipowner's favourite captain. Indeed, Captain Holdsworth had served his employers well, and, as a token of their gratitude, they kept their eyes on his son; which meant that he was appointed the moment he had passed his examination as first mate, and was to be skipper at an age when a good many in the service were just entering upon their duties as third in command. But this only really argued that the owners knew a smart seaman when they saw him. Young Holdsworth was that; and critical as was the jealousy his quick promotion excited, there was not a man who could be got to say that Jack Holdsworth wasn't as good a sailor as ever trod upon shipboard.

The first thing he did, when he had the

banns put up at St. George's, was to rent the little house that turned its shoulder upon the Southbourne main road, and furnish it with the money his aunt had left him. That was to be Dolly's and grandmother's home. Old Mrs. Flemming had some furniture of her own and an annuity ; this last she was to club with John's pay, which Dolly was to draw every month, and so they would have money enough to keep them as ladies. But the old grandmother's furniture was very crazy : she of course thought it beautiful and elegant ; but this did not prevent the chairs from breaking when John sat on them, nor the legs of the tables from coming off when they were handed through the doors. Such of these relics as did not go to pieces were put into her bedroom, at her particular request, because they enabled her to realise

old times ; the rest vanished in a cloud of dust into a distant auction-room, and were never heard of more.

The young people's life was an idyl until the time approached for Holdsworth to sail. They went away for a week after they were married, and Dolly saw life : that is, she saw London, which frightened her, and she was very glad to get home. They had pretty nearly three months before them, and that seemed to give them plenty of time to enjoy themselves in. To be sure, the little cloud upon the horizon grew bigger and bigger every day, and Dolly saw it, and knew that in three months' time it would have overspread the heavens, and filled the earth with its leaden shadow ; but she shrank from looking in that direction, and fixed her eyes on the blue sky overhead, and was as gay under its bright-

ness as if it were never to know an eclipse.

Mrs. Flemming and Dolly had several friends in Southbourne, and during these months tea-parties were pretty frequent. Even the rector asked them to tea, and went to drink tea at their house ; and this occasion was a celebrated one, for the rector was a kind, whimsical old gentleman, and insisted on a game of forfeits being played. There were three girls besides Dolly present, so kissing was practicable ; and loud was the laughter when it fell to the rector's lot to kiss Mrs. Flemming, which he did with such a courtier-like air, that, under its influence, the grandmother's memory unfolded itself ; and she instructed the company, in a tremulous voice, and with a lean, underscoring forefinger, in the behaviour of the men of *her* day, when men

were men, &c. &c. Hunt the slipper followed the forfeits, and the evening was closed with port-negus, October ale, and dishes of fruit, sandwiches, and sweet-meats.

Hours so spent would make just such a memory as would keep a man's heart warm in his bosom under any skies, in any climes, in calm or in storm. Years after the very inscriptions on the tombs of the rector and Mrs. Flemming were scarcely to be read amid the encrusting moss and the toothmarks of time, John Holdsworth remembered that evening: how, flushed as the two Miss Lavernes were into positive prettiness by laughter and Mr. Jackson the curate's discreet kisses, Dolly looked a queen to them; how her sweet eyes had peeped at him over the rector's shoulder, as the worthy clergy-

man claimed his forfeit; how she hung about him and sported, as any infant might, at his side, with her laughter never so ringing and melodious as when her hand was in his. How the kindly grandmother had hobbled about the room, with rusty squeaks of laughter in her mouth, to elude the rector's reluctant pursuit; how Miss Nelly Laverne blushed, and giggled, and tossed her head about when Mr. Jackson kissed her. . . .

The curtain was falling, the lights were dimming, and now tears and sighs and heartrending yearnings were making a cruel ending of the pleasant summer holiday.

CHAPTER II.

TO THE DOWNS.

THE "Meteor" was a full-rigged ship of eleven hundred tons, with painted ports and a somewhat low freeboard, which gave her a rakish look. Her figure-head represented a woman, naked to the waist, emerging from a cloud, and was really a sweet piece of carving. She was a ship of the old school, with big stern windows, and a quaint cuddy front and heavy spars. Yet, built after the old-fashioned model, her lines were as clean as those of an Aberdeen clipper.

She made a glorious picture, as she lay off Gravesend, the clear summer sky tinting the water of the river a pale blue, and converting it into a mirror for an ideal representation of the graceful vessel. Many boats were clustered about her side, and up and down her canvased gangway went hurrying figures. The ensign was at the gaff-end, and at the fore floated the blue-peter, signal to those who took concern in her that she would be soon under weigh.

She was bound to New York, whence she was to carry another cargo south, ultimately touching at Callao before she spread her wings for the old country.

There were a few first-class passengers on board, and some of them stood near the gangway in low and earnest talk with friends, while others were on the poop,

gazing at the shore with wistful eyes. One of these was a widow, whose husband had been buried a few weeks before in the churchyard of a little Kentish town. She was taking her boy back with her to New York, where her friends were; and there they stood, hand in hand, the child with wondering eyes everywhere, the mother with a fixed gaze upon the land which was consecrated for ever to her heart by the beloved form it held.

The river was brilliant and busy with vessels at anchor or passing to and fro, with boats pulling from shore to shore, with the gay sunshine deepening and brightening the colours of flags, or flashing white upon the outstretched canvas, and trembling in silver flakes upon the water. Sailors hung over the forecastle

of the "Meteor," bandying jokes full of pathos, or exchanging farewells with wives and sweethearts, or male friends in boats grouped, with outstretched oars, around the bows of the ship. Some of the hands were aloft casting off the yard-arm gaskets, ready to sheet home when the boatswain's pipe should sound. The wind—a light breeze—was north, a soldier's wind that would take them clear of the river, and make a fair passage for them down Channel; and now they were only waiting for the captain to come on board with the pilot to start.

By eleven o'clock the ship was to be under weigh; and even as the clear chimes of the clock striking the hour floated across the river from the land, a boat pulled by three men swept alongside, and

the captain, followed by the pilot, sprang up the ladder.

A tall, broad-shouldered young man stood at the gangway to receive them, and touched his cap as the captain came on board.

“All ready, Mr. Holdsworth?”

“All ready, sir.”

“Man the windlass then.”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

He was at the break of the poop in a jiffy, and the thunder of his voice went along the deck and brought all hands to a focus on the forecastle as if a line had pulled each man to his place. The boatswain's pipe shrilled, the second mate went forward, the pilot's face, coloured like mahogany, took an anxious expression; and then clank! clank! clank! went the windlass, followed in a moment by a hoarse

song, which at regular intervals burst into a chorus :—

“And when you come to the dockyard gates,
Yo, boys, yo !
You’ll find that Sal for her true love waits,
Heave, my bully-boys, heave !
Then, heave my boys, oh, heave together !
Yo, boys, yo !
And get her out o’ the stormy weather !
Heave, my bully-boys, heave !”

Then came such cries as these :—

“Sheer off you boats there !”

“Get the gangway ladder in-board.”

“Loose the inner jib, one of you !”

“A hand aft and take the wheel !”

“Main-topsail yard ahoy !”

“Hallo !”

“What are you doing there ?”

“Standing by the bunt.”

“Lay down smartly, you lubber !”

To see young Holdsworth now was to see a sailor, with a voice like a gale of wind, the whole great ship and her thousand complications of spars, ropes, sails, packed, so to speak, like a toy in the palm of his hand.

The skipper was below ; the pilot was lord and master now, and Holdsworth watched his face for orders.

Soon the cable was up and down, the anchor lifted, and some hands left the windlass to make sail. The tide had got the ship, and she was floating almost imperceptibly past a large American vessel that had brought-up the evening before. A few boats followed ; some turned and made for Gravesend, the inmates standing up and waving their hats and handkerchiefs.

By this time the anchor was apeak, and all hands quitted the windlass to make

sail. Then you might hear cries of "Sheet home!" from the air; down fell great spaces of canvas like avalanches of snow; chains rattled through blocks; fore and aft songs and choruses were raised and continued until silenced by the order "Belay!" The yards rose slowly up the polished masts and stretched the canvas tight as drumskins. The men on board the Yankee crowded her forecastle and gave the Britisher a cheer as she passed. Amid the songs of the men, the piping of the boatswain and his mates, and the noisy commands of the pilot, the "Meteor" burst into a cloud of canvas, chipped a white wave out of the blue river, and went ahead like a yacht in a racing match.

The breeze freshened as the river widened. The decks were quiet now, the

ropes coiled down clear for running, and everything hauled as taut and snug as if the ship had been at sea a month. At two o'clock she was foaming along under royals and flying-jib, whisking past colliers dragging their main channels through the water as if they were drowning flies struggling for the land; overhauling smart schooners and ships as big as herself, and making the land on either side of her dwindle down and down into flat marshy country.

The pilot, pompous to the last extremity, with bow legs and moist eyes, strutted fore and aft the poop, sometimes calling an order to the man at the wheel, and constantly looking aloft, ahead, and around him. The passengers lounged about the deck or hung over the side, watching the foaming water rush past them, and almost losing—those of them,

at least, who were leaving their homes—their sadness in the sense of exhilaration begotten by the swift speeding of the vessel through the glory and freshness of the summer afternoon.

Forward, the men were industrious in the fore-castle, rigging up their hammocks, or preparing their bunks for the night, or overhauling their sea-chests, or the canvas bags which, among seamen, often answer the purpose of sea-chests. It was a queer sight to see their busy figures in the twilight of the fore-castle—here the black face of a negro; there the broad features of a Dutchman; here a mulatto; there a lantern-jawed Yankee, peak-bearded and narrow-hipped—a world in miniature, something after the nature of a menagerie, all talking in English, with accents which made the effect indescribable gibberish to

the unaccustomed ear. They were most of them friends already; some had sailed in company before; and now they would suspend their work to offer one another a chew of tobacco, to beg the loan of a "draw," meaning a pipe; while the air grew insufferable to all but a seaman's digestion, with the smell of black cavendish and the inexpressible odour of bilge-water, tar, hemp, and the ship's cargo generally, which rose directly through the fore-hatch, and was blown into the fore-castle by the draught under the foresail.

At eight o'clock the "Meteor" was off Margate, all sails but royals set; one of the noblest spectacles of beauty, grace, and majesty the world has to offer—a full-rigged ship—a leaning mountain of canvas rushing under the sky, with a whirl of

foam bursting like two gigantic white arms from her sides.

But the North Foreland brings you to a sharp turn, and the wind had drawn three or four points to the west, and was blowing fresh in Mid Channel as the pilot saw by the distant Goodwin Sands on the port bow, which lay upon the horizon in a long streak of foam, like the Milky-way in the sky.

This was a pity, because, unless they were disposed to stand for the French shore, and so make Folkestone by a long board, they would have to bring-up in the Downs.

However, there was no help for it; for, though the vessel's yards were braced hard up against the lee rigging, she continued to fall off half a point by half a point, and, by the time she was off Ramsgate,

her head was south. But the "Meteor" could sail to windward like a yacht. They furled the mainsail, took a single reef in the topsails, and then all hands stood by to put the ship about. Standing-by is sailors' English for being ready. The men went forward, and the ship, with two hands at the wheel, made straight for the South Sand Head—the southernmost portion of the formidable Goodwin Sands.

The Channel was a glorious scene. The sun had sunk behind the land, bequeathing a broad red glare to the heavens, over which some great clouds were unfurling themselves—livid promontories with flaring crimson headlands. Astern rose the solid white cliffs, looking phantasmal upon the dark-coloured water. On the right the land swept into a bay, hugging the water flatly as far as Deal, then rising into a

great front of frowning cliffs, which stood black against the background of the red sky. The gloom of the gathering evening had paled the outlines of the houses into the shadowy land ; but here and there you could see small vessels riding close in shore, or smacks with red sails creeping round the various points, whilst all between was the quick-running sea, coloured by the different depths of sand into an aspect of wild and multiform beauty. Away on the left the water, quivering with hurrying waves polished like oil, stretched to a dim and desolate horizon. Here and there a brig, or a barque, ploughed laboriously for the Downs, shipping seas like columns of snow and lurching like a drunkard that must presently fall. The "Meteor" overtook and passed many of these vessels as if they were

buoys, sometimes running so close alongside as to take the wind out of their sails and set them upright on an even keel. It was strange to look down upon their decks, lying close to the water, and see the steersmen gazing upwards, the masters walking to and fro and not deigning to notice anything but their own ships, a head or two peering over the bulwarks ; to hear the groaning and grunting of the timbers, the yelling of the wind in the masts ; and then, in a moment, to see them pitching and tumbling astern, dwindling into toys and scarcely perceptible among the lead-coloured waves.

But now the crimson had faded out from over the land, and where it had vanished burned a strong and steady light, topping the summit of the highest and outermost cliff. The night fell, and all about the

expanse of water innumerable lights started into life : lanterns of vessels in the Downs, of passing ships, of the Goodwin beacons. The clouds which had looked slate-coloured against the sunset were now white, and rolled like great volumes of steam across the stars. Then right ahead of the ship rose a pale white line—a quick, spectral play of froth, and a great, red star shining like an arrested meteor, and which a few minutes before seemed to be many miles distant, grew big and lurid and dangerous.

A deep voice sounded along the “Meteor”
—“All hands about ship!”

A rush of feet and then a silence ; round flew the wheel like a firework ; the red light ahead swept away giddily to the left.

“Helm’s alee!”

The canvas shook like thunder, and the

passengers crowded aft, wondering to find the ship upright.

“Mainsail haul!”

And at this signal forth burst a loud chorus ; the released braces allowed the yard to fly round, the decks echoed to the tramping of feet and to the cries of men ; the vessel lay over as though she must capsize ; there was a rush of inexperienced passengers to windward ; another hoarse command ; round flew the foreyards, and in a few minutes the “Meteor” was darting through the water with her head for Deal, and the pale phosphorescent gleam of the Goodwin Sands dying out upon the sea on her weather quarter.

The ship tacked three times during the next hour ; and at half-past nine the wind lulled, and the moon came out of the sea, a broad, yellow shield. There was some-

thing indescribably solemn in the rising of this orb as she climbed in a haze over the edge of the horizon, and flashed a wedge of quivering light into the tumbling waters. The sails of the "Meteor" caught the radiance presently, and her long wake glittered in the light like a trail of silver spangles.

She was in the Downs now, and in a dead calm, and within a quarter of an hour she was riding at anchor, everything furled aloft, and taut and snug as a man-of-war, with many ships about her, resting like phantom vessels on the surface of the water.

The watch was set, the binnacle and riding-lamps trimmed, the watch below turned in, the other watch lay down upon their chests or on the deck to sleep in their clothes; and a deep repose fell upon

the erewhile busy, labouring ship. The silence was unbroken, save by the murmur of some of the passengers talking in a group around the cuddy skylight, or by the sound of a fiddle played in some one of the nearer-lying vessels, or by the faint, melodious murmur of the breakers boiling upon the pebbly strand of Deal.

A breathless summer night! with big shooting-stars chasing the heavens, and a moon growing smaller and brighter each moment, and the dim tracery of the tapering masts and rigging of the "Meteor" pointing from the deep and vanishing in the gloom. Away on the left, for the tide had swung the ship round and pointed her bowsprit up Channel, glittered the lights of Deal, suggestions of home life which riveted many eyes and made many hearts thoughtful and sad — none more so than

Holdsworth's, whose watch it was, and who, now that his active duties were over, could surrender himself to the bitter luxury of thought.

He paced to and fro athwart the poop, his heart far away in the little village he had quitted. The face of his child-wife rose before him, and he lived again in the hard parting that had wrenched his heart and sent him sobbing from his home. He felt her clinging arms about his neck ; he looked down into her swollen eyes ; he repeated again and again, in broken tones, his fond and last entreaty that she would keep her heart up, pray for him, and think only of the joyous summer that would come to bless and bring them together once more.

The music ceased in the distance ; the tinkling of bells, announcing the half-hour

past ten, came stealing across the water, and was echoed by five ringing strokes upon the bell on the "Meteor's" quarter-deck.

Half-past ten! Was Dolly sleeping now? Had her grief and her tears wearied her into repose? How long, how very long it seemed since he saw her last! The time was to be counted in hours, but it appeared days and weeks to him.

He leaned with his arms upon the poop rails, and stood lost in thought. A question asked in a soft voice made him turn.

"Do all those lights there belong to ships?"

The speaker was the widow to whom Holdsworth's attention had been several times attracted during the day by the air of sadness her face wore, and her devotion to her bright-haired little boy, whose sweet

wondering eyes, as he cast them round, had reminded him of Dolly's, and drawn his heart to him.

"Yes, they belong to ships at anchor like ours."

"How beautiful is this night! I have left my boy asleep and stolen from the cabin to breathe the fresh air."

"I daresay the dear little fellow sleeps well after the excitement he has gone through. I noticed that his wondering eyes were very busy when we were in the river."

Hearing this, she grew frank and cordial at once. Her woman's heart was as sure of him as if she had known him all his life.

"Did you notice my child. I should have thought you were too much occupied. He was tired out, God bless him! when I

put him to bed; too tired even to say his prayers. He has no father now to love him, so I must give him a double share of my love."

"Ah, you will not find that hard. He is a manly little fellow, and he and I will become great friends, I hope."

"I trust you will . . . You are Mr. Holdsworth? I heard the captain call you by that name. And you are the chief mate?"

"Yes, madam."

"I admire your profession, Mr. Holdsworth, and have a good excuse for doing so, for both my father and brother were sailors. But I don't think I could ever let my boy go to sea; I could never bear to part with him. And I sometimes wonder how the wives of sailors can endure to be separated from their husbands."

"That is the hardest part of our profession" answered Holdsworth quickly. "I never understood it before this voyage. I have had to leave my young wife; may God protect her until I come back."

"Is she very young?"

"Nineteen."

"Poor girl!" exclaimed the widow, with deep sympathy in her voice. She added, cheerfully, "But this separation will only make you dearer to each other. You are sure to meet again. Time flies quickly, and all these weary days will seem no more than a dream to you when you are together."

She sighed and glanced down at the deep crape on her dress. The moonlight enabled Holdsworth to notice the glance, and the pathos of it silenced him. In the presence of such an experience as

her parting was—he knew whom she had lost by her reference to her fatherless boy—his own sorrow appeared light.

“There is always hope, there is always the promise of happiness in store while there is life,” she continued gently. “Do not be down-hearted, Mr. Holdsworth. This parting is but a temporary interruption of your happiness. Be sure that God will protect your young wife while you are away, and do not doubt that He will lead you back to her.” She smiled softly at him, and adding, “I must go to my little one now,” bowed cordially and went away.

He could have blessed her for an assurance which, having no better foundation than a woman’s sympathy, cheered him as no thoughts of his own could have done. “That is a true heart,” he said to

himself, and resumed his walk, repeating her words over and over again, and drawing a comfort from them that made his step elastic and his eyes bright.

CHAPTER III.

DOWN CHANNEL.

AT six o'clock next morning the sleeping passengers were awakened by cries and trampings which, to some of them at least, were novel disturbers of their slumbers. They might have told the reason of all this noise without going on deck; for those who slept in cots found the deck making an angle with their beds, and the lee port-holes veiled with rushing green water, and all the movables crowded together at any distance from where they had been deposited the night before. And hoarse cries sounded and the clanking of

massive chains, and the strange groaning a ship makes when she heels over to a weight of canvas.

Yes! the "Meteor" was under weigh, with a spanking breeze on the starboard quarter, which she would haul round abeam—her best point of sailing—when she had cleared the South Foreland. If this breeze held, the pilot said, he would be out of the ship and toasting her in rum and water at Plymouth before the sun went down next day.

Some of the passengers came on deck when the ship was off Folkestone, and then they saw as fair a sight as the world has to offer—the great white English cliffs topped with swelling tracts of green, with here and there small bays with spaces of yellow sand between; houses thickly grouped—so it seemed in behold-

ing them from the sea—upon the very margin of the cliff; slate-coloured hills paling far, far away with visionary clouds upon them; and between the ship and the shore many pleasure-boats and other craft, with white or ochre-coloured sails and bright flags, lending spots of red and blue to the perspective of the chalky cliff.

The pilot hugged the wind, rightly apprehensive that it might draw ahead and cripple him for sea room; and the "Meteor" hereabouts was so close to the land that those on board her could see the people walking on shore—man's majesty illustrated by dots of black upon the beach or the heights. Overhead was a brilliantly blue sky, with small woolly clouds driving over it; the sea laughed in dimples and shivered the white sunlight far and wide, so that every crest gleamed with a dia-

mond spark of its own ; and away on the left, a pale faint cloud floating upon the horizon, was the French coast.

The gay panorama swept by and new scenes opened — stretches of barren coast with ungainly Coastguards' huts for their sole decoration ; spaces of vivid green ruled off with lines of soft brown sand, and low black rocks mirrored in the lake-like surface of the water under the lee ; white-washed villages with wreaths of blue smoke curling from their midst, and broad expanses of trees darkening the lightlier-coloured landscape with delicate shadows. Sturdy vessels, the dray-horses of the Channel, slow, deep laden, and wafting, many of them, the scent of pine and other woods across the water, were overtaken and passed, often amid the laughter of the crew on the "Meteor's" forecastle,

and "chaff," which even the grave Captain Steel, the "Meteor's" skipper, condescended to smile at. How picturesque these vessels ! Here a Dutch barque painted white, with square-faced men staring over the bulwarks, a red-capped commander in sea boots and vast inexpressibles, and a steersman who sometimes looked at the "Meteor" and sometimes at the sails of his own ship, mixing duty and curiosity in a manner delightful to behold ; there a North-country brig with dirty patched sails and black rigging, and a crew with smoked faces and a grinning head at the galley door ; sometimes a French smack with as many hands on board as would man a Black Ball Liner, women among them in red petticoats and handkerchiefs around their faces, some gutting fish, some mending nets, some peeling

potatoes, and all talking and gesticulating at once, but suspending both their work and their talk to crowd to the smack's side and stare at the noble English vessel ; and sometimes a little open boat at anchor, with a man in her fishing with deep gravity, and paying no more heed to the ship in whose wake his cockle-shell would bob like a cork float, than were he the only tenant of the great glittering surface of water.

But soon the coast sunk low in the horizon. The "Meteor" was standing for the deeper water of the Middle Channel, and close hauled, but with all sails set, she had paled old England into a thin blue cloud, and was heading straight for the great Atlantic Ocean.

The night passed ; the morning broke ; but the "Meteor" was not out of the

Channel yet. The pilot grumbled as he cast his groggy eyes aloft and saw the weather-leaches lifting. He would have to go about to fetch Plymouth, unless he had a mind to cross the Atlantic, and this was certainly not his intention.

All the passengers came on deck after breakfast; the ladies brought out their work, the gentlemen lighted cigars, and those who had made a voyage before looked knowing as they cast their eyes about and asked nautical questions of the captain.

As to the pilot, he was ungetatable. Moreover, his language was so clouded with marine expletives that his lightest answer was generally a shock to the sensibilities.

Every boatman from Margate to Penzance calls himself a pilot nowadays;

but the genuine pilot — such a man as this who was taking the “Meteor” down Channel—stands out upon the canvas of marine grouping with an individuality that makes him unique among seafaring human kind. Figure a square, bow-legged man, in a suit of heavy pilot cloth, a red shawl round his neck, a tall hat on his head, a throat the colour of an uncooked beefsteak, and a face of a complexion like new mahogany, small moist rolling eyes, a voice resembling the tones of a man with the bronchitis calling through a tin trumpet, and an undying affection for Jamaica rum. Such was Mr. Dumling, the “Meteor’s” pilot, a man to whom the gaunt sea-battered posts, the tall skeleton buoys, the fat wallowing beacons, and the endless variety of lights ashore and at sea, from the North Foreland to

the Land's End, were as familiar and intelligible as the alphabet is to you ; who was so profoundly acquainted with the Channel that he boasted his power to tell you within a quarter of a mile of where he was, by the mere faculty of smell ! A man who could look over a ship's side and say, " Here are four fathoms of water, and yonder are nine," " And where the shadow of the cloud rests the water is twelve fathoms deep ;" and so on, every inch of the road, for miles and miles—a miracle of memory ! To appreciate the value of such a man you should be with him in the Channel in a pitch-dark night, blowing great guns from the north-east, with the roar of the Goodwin on the lee bow, and a sea so heavy that every blow the ship receives communicates the impression that she has

struck the ground, while the black air is hoarse with the gale and fogged with stinging spray.

The wind is nowhere more capricious than in the English Channel. At one o'clock the spanking breeze swept round to the south-east; the watch went to work at the braces; up went the fore-topmast-stun'sail, and the "Meteor" rushed ahead at twelve knots an hour.

"We shall be off Plymouth at eight o'clock," says the pilot, and went below to lunch with a serene face.

He was right. At eight o'clock the "Meteor" was lying with her main yards backed, dipping her nose in a lively sea, with a signal for a boat streaming at her mast-head.

The passengers might take their last look at old England then, whilst the

glorious sunset bathed the land in gold, and made the wooded shores beautiful with colour and shadow. And now, dancing over the waters, came a white sail, which dimmed slowly into an ashen hue as the crimson in the skies faded and the waters darkened.

"Any letters for shore?" says Captain Steel, moving among the passengers, and soon his hand grows full. Many of the men come forward and deliver missives for the wife, for Sue, for Poll, to the skipper, who gives them to the pilot. The boat, glistening with the sea-water she has shipped, sweeps alongside, ducks her sail, and is brought up by a line flung from the main chains.

"Good-bye, cap'n," says the gruff pilot; "wish you a pleasant voyage, I'm sure, gen'l'men and ladies;" drops into the

main chains, and from the main chains drops into the boat; the sail is hoisted, a hat waved, a cheer given from the ship's forecastle, and away bounds the lugger in a cloud of spray.

Now bawls Captain Steel from the break of the poop; round swing the main yards; the noble ship heels over, trembles, and starts forward, and, with the expiring gleam of the sunset upon her highest sails, the "Meteor" heads for the broad Atlantic, and glides into the gloom and space of the infinite, windy night.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE ATLANTIC.

THERE were eight passengers and twenty-seven hands, counting captain and officers, on board the "Meteor;" in all, thirty-five souls.

In these days half that number of men would be thought ample to handle a ship of eleven hundred tons. Taking fourteen men as a ship's company, we find—one, the cook, who is useless aloft; five ordinary seamen, equal to two able-bodied men; four ill and unable to leave their bunks; the remainder consist of

the captain, two mates, and the carpenter. So that a summons for all hands to shorten sail, for example, brings forth about enough men to do the work of one yard—one yard, when there are twelve, exclusive of trysails, jibs, stun'sails, spanker, and staysails. This modern system of undermanning ships is an evil next in magnitude to that of sending crazy and leaky vessels to sea; and as many ships are lost for want of hands to work them on occasions which demand promptitude and muscle, as are lost by rotten planks and overcharged cargoes.

The passengers on board the "Meteor" consisted of four gentlemen, two ladies, a little boy, and a female servant. Of the gentlemen, one was a young man named Holland, who was going to America for no other purpose than to see Niagara;

another was a merchant, who was to represent a London house in New York. He was accompanied by his wife and her maid. The third was a General in the United States Army, a fine old man with a chivalrous courtesy of manner and a handsome honest face, who had been picking up what professional hints he could find by a year's sojourn in the military depôts of Great Britain. The fourth male passenger was an actor, magnificently named Gerald Fitzmaurice St. Aubyn, in quest of more appreciative audiences in the New Country than his genius had encountered in the Old. The widow and her son completed the list.

It took these good people a very short time to settle down to their new life and adjust themselves to the novel conditions of existence that surrounded them.

The ladies lay hidden at the first going off; and, although Mr. St. Aubyn put in a punctual appearance at meals and smoked a great quantity of cheroots, it must be admitted that he was peculiarly pensive for a comedian, whose genius, he affirmed, was chiefly at home in genteel farce, though he had enacted tragedy with applause.

The "Meteor" met with adverse winds, but brilliant weather, during the first few days. She tacked north and south, and crowded canvas to make headway, but, though her speed was great through the water, her actual progress was small.

"No matter," said Captain Steel, patiently; "we may get a gale astern of us some of these hours, and then we'll make up for lost time."

But whilst the weather remained so

beautiful, the wind brisk and the sea smooth, the passengers could hardly regret the delay. It was like yacht sailing—dry decks, steady motion, and always the pleasurable sense of swiftness inspired by the beaded foam crisping by and stretching like a tape astern. Now and again they signalled a ship homeward bound or journeying south. The widow's little boy clapped his hands to see the bright flags flying at the mizzen-peak, and the ladies were lost in wonderment to think that those gay colours were a language as intelligible to those concerned in their interpretation as "How do you do?" and "Very well, thank you."

The "Meteor" had a snug cuddy; and a hospitable sight was the dinner-table, with the white cloth covering the long board, the gleaming silver and glass, the

fine claret jug (testimonial by former passengers to the captain), the colours of wines in decanters, the grinning negro always colliding with the steward, and the skipper's rubicund face, relieved by soft white hair, at the head of the table, backed by the polished mizzen-mast. Overhead was the skylight, through which you might see the great sails towering to the heavens; and over the dinner-table swung a globe of gold fish between two baskets of ferns. There was a piano lashed abaft the mizzen-mast; and all around the cuddy were the cabins occupied by the passengers, the captain, the mates, with highly-varnished doors and white panels relieved with edgings of gold.

Everybody took an interest in the widow's little boy, both because he was

a pretty child, and because it was whispered about that he had lost his father but a few weeks ago. He and Holdsworth became great friends, as Holdsworth had said they would. Whenever it was the first mate's watch on deck, the little fellow would paddle away from his mother's side and come to him, and ask him to tell him stories, and show him the ship's compass, at which he was never weary of looking. Then you might see Holdsworth on a hencoop, or the skylight, with the child upon his knee, coining nautical fairy-yarns of people who live under the sea, and ride in chariots composed of coral, to which fish with scales shining like precious stones are harnessed.

Sometimes the widow, whose name was Tennent, would come on deck and find them together, when she would sit beside

them and listen with a smile to Holdsworth, whose stories the little boy Louis would on no account suffer his mamma to interrupt. And to repay him for his kindness to the child, and not more for that than because she admired his honest nature, and was won by his gentle and tender simplicity, she would lead him on, with a world of feminine tact, to talk of his wife, and comfort and make him happy with her sympathy, her interest, and her assurances.

She was a calm, gentle-faced woman, with a settled sorrow in the expression of her eyes that made her look older than she was, but her age would scarcely exceed thirty-six. She showed little inclination to converse with the other passengers, and would retire early at night, and in the daytime sit in quiet

places about the deck, always with her boy beside her.

The merchant's wife, on the other hand, Mrs. Ashton, was a gay, talkative woman, a showy dresser and fond of a quiet boast, which her husband, a short man with a yellow beard, took care never to contradict. Mr. Holland began to pay her attention straightway, and then Mr. St. Aubyn stepped in with theatrical emphasis and smooth observations, like the speeches in comedies. Captain Steel, though very polite to this lady, inclined to Mrs. Tennent, — his sailor's heart appreciating her defencelessness, and propounding all kinds of problems how best to amuse, please, and cheer her. But though she could not fail to like the honest skipper, she evidently preferred Holdsworth, who would go and talk to

her for an hour at a time about Dolly, and then listen, with a face of kindest sympathy, to little passages out of her own life.

And so a week went by, and the ship strove with the baffling winds, which blew directly from the quarter to which her bowsprit should have pointed, and captain and men began to chafe, finding the job of putting the ship about tiresome at last.

On the seventh day, about the hour of sunset, the wind fell, and the surface of the sea became polished as glass, though from the north-east there came, through the mighty expanse of water, a long and regular swell, which made the ship rise and fall as regularly as the breath of a sleeper.

“We shall have the wind from that

quarter, I think, sir," said Holdsworth to the skipper.

"Or is this an after-swell, Mr. Holdsworth?" suggested the skipper, sending his keen gaze across the sea to the horizon, where the sky was as blue as it was overhead.

There was no telling. This long and regular swell might be the precursor of a gale, or the effects of one that had passed. The barometer had fallen, but this might only indicate a southerly wind, not necessarily dirty weather. The heavens were perfectly tranquil; the day was fading into a serene and gloriously beautiful evening, with no hint in all its benign aspect to suggest the need of the slightest precaution.

Mrs. Ashton was at the piano, ac-

companying Mr. St. Aubyn to a song, which he sung so affectedly that some of the hands forward mimicked him, and the forecastle seemed full of guinea-pigs.

Her husband popped his head over the skylight and called to her to come and view the sunset. Up she came, escorted by Mr. Holland and the actor, flounced showily into a chair, and fell into a rapture.

"Oh, how beautiful! The sea looks like gold! doesn't it, Captain Steel? See how red the sails are! Ah, if I could only paint! what fame such a picture as this would bring me."

True; but then what manner of pigments was needful to reproduce the glory, the colour, the calm, the infinity of that wonderful scene!

The sun was sinking down a cloudless horizon, and was now a vast crimson ball,

throbbing and quivering with his lower limb upon the sea-line. There was something overwhelming in the unspeakable majesty of his unattended descent. As the huge crimson body appeared to hang for some moments above the sea before dipping, even Mrs. Ashton held her tongue, and seemed impressed with the tremendous spectacle of loneliness submitted by the globe of fire sinking away from the sky with the vast solitude of the deep in the foreground. Far into the measureless ocean he had sunk a cone of fire, while the heights above and around him were dim with burning haze. The sails of the "Meteor" were yellow in the expiring light; her topmasts seemed veined with lines of flame; and the brass-work about her decks reflected innumerable suns, each with threads of glory about it, that blinded the eyes to encounter.

But even while they gazed the sun vanished, and darkness came with long strides across the deep, kindling the stars and transforming the masts and yards of the ship into phantom tracery as delicate as frostwork to look at.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Holland in a tone of rapture, "that's as fine a sight as I must hope to see anywhere."

"If you could introduce a scene like that, Mr. St. Aubyn, on the stage, eh?" laughed the General.

"Why, as to that," replied Mr. St. Aubyn, "let me tell you, General, that there are some very fine scenes to be found in the large theatres in London. In the second act of 'Pizarro,' as I saw it the other night at Drury Lane, there's a scene representing the Temple of the

Sun ; the sun is setting—and God knows how they managed it, but the sun *did* sink, not like yonder one, but very finely in clouds, just as ‘Ataliba’ exclaims, drawing his sword, ‘Now, my brethren, my sons, my friends, I know your valour. Should ill success assail us . . . ’”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Mr. Holland impatiently ; “but I always considered ‘Pizarro,’ as a play, to be full of very poor rant. Who talks in real life like the fellows in that piece are made to talk ?”

“My dear sir !” exclaimed Mr. St. Aubyn with a smile of contempt, “the stage is the arena of poetry ; we are idealists . . . ”

“Because you never mean what you say,” said Mr. Ashton, lighting a cigar.

“Oh, excuse me,” rejoined Mr. St.

Aubyn, "true actors are always in earnest. Siddons was."

"I once met Sarah Siddons," said Mrs. Ashton. "Do you remember, dear, at Lord Shortlands?" addressing her husband.

"I was only once at a theatre in my life," observed Captain Steel, who had been listening to the conversation with an impressed face. "That was at Plymouth. They gave us our money's worth. There was plenty of fighting and love-making, and two traitors, both of whom died game and covered with blood. There was a little too much gunpowder at the end; but I rather think they raised smoke to hide the acting, which fell off as the piece made headway. The best part of the entertainment, to my thinking, was a fight between

two sailors in a private box. Mr. St. Aubyn, where do you gentlemen, when you are run through the body, stow all the blood you lose ? That's often puzzled me to think."

"Oh, don't let me hear," cried Mrs. Ashton. "I hate to be told such secrets."

"Captain," said the General, "how long is this calm going to last?"

"All night, I am afraid. How's her head?" sang out the captain.

"East-south-east, sir," responded the man at the wheel.

"We're homeward bound," said the captain, laughing; "the old girl wants to get back again."

He walked away from the group, and stood near the wheel, gazing aloft and around. The passengers continued talking and laughing, their voices sounding unreal

when listened to at a distance, and with the great, desolate, silent sea breathing around. The sails flapped lazily aloft, and the wheel-chains clanked from time to time as the vessel rose and fell. Mrs. Tennent came on deck, the captain joined her, and they walked up and down. On the other side of the deck paced the second mate. Forward were the dark shadows of some of the hands upon the forecastle, smoking pipes and talking in low voices.

The night had fallen darkly ; there was no moon, but the stars were large and brilliant, and glittered in flakes of white light in the sea. Presently a fiddle was played in the forecastle, and a voice sang a mournful tune that sounded weirdly in the gloom, and with a muffled note. The air and voice were not without sweetness, but there was the melancholy in it which

many songs popular among sailors have, and the wailing cadence was helped out by the ghostly sails rearing their glimmering spaces, and the subdued splash of the water about the bows, as the ship sunk into the hollows of the swell.

Mrs. Tennent stopped, with the captain, at the poop-rail to listen.

"What odd music!" cried Mrs. Ashton. "It sounds as if someone were playing out in the sea there."

"Let's have the fiddler here," said Mr. Holland. "I like to enlarge my mind by observation, and have never yet heard a real Jack Tar sing."

"Oh yes! oh yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, while Mr. St. Aubyn called out, "I'll go and fetch him."

"Better stop where you are, sir," said the skipper, dryly; "the forecastle's a

dangerous hold for landsmen to put their heads into. Mr. Thompson," he called to the second mate, "just go and send that fiddler aft here."

Presently came the man, followed at a respectful distance by a crowd of his mates, who drew to the capstan on the quarter-deck, and waited for what was to follow.

The fiddler and vocalist was a stumpy seaman, with black whiskers, a hooked nose, and keen black eyes, dressed in loose canvas breeches, well smeared with tar, and a canvas shirt, with a belt about his middle in which was a sheath-knife. He hailed from Southampton, but had gone so many voyages in every species of ships, Danish, French, Spanish, American, that he might fairly claim to belong to the whole world.

He scraped with his left foot, and stood bashfully awaiting orders, his glittering

eyes travelling over the group of gentlemen and ladies.

"You're wanted to sing a song, Daniels," said Captain Steel.

"Ay, ay, sir. What might it be?"

"Something wild and plaintive," suggested Mrs. Ashton.

"Give us a song about a sweetheart," said Mr. Holland.

This was English to the sailor; so, after a few moments' reflection, he screwed his fiddle into his neck, scraped a few bars, and then sang.

He did his best, and murmurs from time to time about the capstan illustrated enthusiastic appreciation in one portion of his audience at least. Those on the poop were more quiet, impressed by the peculiar wildness of the song, and the rough, uncouth melody of the tune.

The song was about a woman whose

husband was a sailor. The sailor went away to sea, and did not come home, and she thought he had deserted her; so she put on man's clothes, shipped on board a vessel as a "hand," and went in search of him. One night she is on the forecastle, on the look-out. The watch are asleep; there's not a breath of air :

When, looking over the starboard side,
She sees a face as pale
As snow upon a mountain top,
Or moonlight on a sail.

The figure attached to the face rises, waist high, out of the water, and extends his hands.

"O God!" she screams, "is this my love?
Can this my Joey be?"
And then she casts her eyes above
And jumps into the sea.

And sure enough the phantom *was* Joey, who had not deserted her, as she had cruelly thought, but had been drowned in the very spot where the vessel she was on board of was becalmed. The song wound up with an injunction to all wives or sweethearts of sailors never to think that their Joes have played them false because they do not return to their homes.

The passengers thanked the man for his song, and Mrs. Ashton wanted another; but Captain Steel, holding that enough condescension had been exhibited, bade the singer go to the steward and get a "tot of grog."

Much criticism followed; but all, with the exception of Mr. St. Aubyn, owned themselves impressed by the rough simplicity and tragical theme of the fore-castle ballad.

“Pshaw!” cried the actor; “put the man on a stage before an audience, and he’d be hissed off. It’s the queer scratching of the catgut and the picturesque costume of the fellow that have pleased you. His voice isn’t good enough to get him the post of call-boy at a theatre.”

A warm argument followed this decision, and lasted nearly half an hour, during which the General and Mr. Ashton left the group; then the steward’s bell rang, and the passengers went below to their nightly potations and to munch sweet biscuits.

CHAPTER V.

A GALE OF WIND.

AT midnight Holdsworth came on deck to relieve the second mate. A man out of the port watch came to the wheel, and stood yawning, scarcely awake. The night was dark—a hazy atmosphere through which the stars gleamed sparely, and the sea like ebony. The rise and fall of the ship flapped the sails against the masts and drove eddies of air about the decks, but in reality there was not a breath of wind.

There was something stupendous in the black, profound, and breathless placidity

of the night. The compass swung round in the binnacle anywhere, but the swell made the rudder kick heavily now and again, and gave the wheel a twist which flung the spokes out of the man's hand and woke him up.

This prolonged inactivity was galling. One longed to hear the rush of parting water and the singing of the wind in the shrouds.

The mainsail flapped so heavily that Holdsworth ordered it to be furled. The song of the men brought the captain on deck. He flitted, shadow-like, about the binnacle, sniffed at the night impatiently, and then went to Holdsworth.

"The glass has fallen half an inch since eight bells," said he.

"Yes, sir; there'll be a change before morning."

"Better stow the royals and mizzen-top gall'ns'l."

"Ay, ay, sir."

These, the topmost sails of the ship, were just discernible from the deck. In a few moments their dim outlines melted, and some dark figures went up into the gloom and vanished.

The captain returned to his cabin, and Holdsworth strolled the deck. At two bells (one o'clock) the haze went out of the sky and the stars shone fiercely. Holdsworth, standing on the starboard side of the poop, felt a light air creeping about his face, and the sound of the flapping sails ceased.

"How's her head?"

"North-a-quarter-west, sir."

He sang out an order, and a crowd of figures came tumbling out of the forecastle

and manned the port braces. The air died away, but presently came a quick puff which made the water bubble around the ship.

Holdsworth's eyes were upon the weather-horizon. The stars burned purely, but away upon the water-line was a thick shadow.

Again the wind died out and there was a breathless stillness, amid which you might hear a sound—vague, murmurous, indescribable—a distant echo it might seem of something infinitely distant.

“Stand by the topgallant halliards !”

A sense of expectation seemed to pervade the very ship herself as she stood upright with her dim canvas flapping in the darkness above.

The distant murmur grew more defined, and took such a tone as you may hear

in small sharp rain falling at a distance upon leaves. Then, out of the murky horizon some clouds came rolling—long, attenuated shadows, resembling visionary arms clutching at the stars. The murmur approached ; the clouds, swinging along the sky, formed into compact groups. Hark to the quick hissing of the water lashed by the wind !

In a moment the sails were round and hard, the ship with her port-chains under water, and the wind screeching fiercely over the ebony surface of the sea, and whitening it with foam.

The captain was on the poop, holding on to the main-topgallant backstay, and shrieking orders like one possessed. It was indeed briefly a case of "Let go everything !" Under full topsail, foresail, staysails, and jibs, the ship was too heavily

weighted for the surprising violence of the wind, and was powerless to right herself. But every order given was the right one. And now you heard the deep tones of Holdsworth's powerful voice mingling with the agitated commands of the skipper, while yards came rushing down upon the caps, and sails banged and roared aloft, and men shouted lustily about the decks, and the sea fled in cataracts of foam under the vessel's bows.

A time of deep excitement, but scarcely of suspense—there was too much hurrying for that.

There would have been something incredible to an inexperienced landsman in the sight of the dark figures swarming up the shrouds to give battle to the wild array of canvas which groaned and bellowed like a dozen thunderstorms in the sky—a

spectacle of human pluck not to be realised, or in the faintest degree appreciated, by those who have not beheld it. The night black—the yards slanting so that the extremity of the main-yard touched the water; the footing upon those yards a thin line which must be felt for by the feet; the canvas, loosened by the lowering of the yard, bellied by the force of the wind many feet above the heads of the reefers, and presenting to their hands a surface of iron; and the three masts quivering under the shock and convulsions of the sails!

All hands were at work now, and there were men enough to reef both big topsails at once, whilst others over their heads furled the topgallant sails. Holdsworth had been one of the first to spring up the main rigging; he knew the value of every pair of hands in that moment of danger;

and away—active, daring, his hands and arms like steel—he clambered for the weather-earing. But the boatswain was before him, so he made for the lee yard-arm.

Figure a smooth spar, forty-five feet long, sloping at a height of as many feet to the water's surface, the said surface not being a mill pond, but a sheet of foam; figure a pitch dark night, a line stretched along the yard, down which you must slide to the extremity, a sail weighing half-a-dozen tons banging at your head and your feet, and doing its utmost to throw you; then, having reached the extremity of the yard, figure your legs thrown across it as you might bestride a horse, beneath you the foaming sea, almost at right angles the inclined deck of the ship, a long stone's throw distant—a deep darkness everywhere,

save where a wave, breaking massively, flings out a phosphorescent light and deepens the blackness of its own chasm — whilst the gale yells about your ears, and blinds you with spray that stings like hail !

Figure this, and you will then very faintly realise what “taking the lee-earing” in a gale at sea means.

The cries of the men aloft, and the beating of the canvas, sounded like an unearthly contest in mid-air ; but they ceased presently, and then the hands came hurrying down the rigging and fell to the halliards. Holdsworth sprang on to the poop, his cap gone, his hair blown about his eyes, and roared out orders, while the captain, more easy in his mind about his spars, went aft and hung about the binnacle, watching the compass often.

The ship was now under double-reefed

topsails, and reeling through the darkness almost bare of sail. The wind was increasing in violence every five minutes, and an ugly Atlantic sea was running right athwart the ship's course, hurling great waves against her starboard beam, which ran in waterspouts of foam as high as the main-top, and was blown in big hissing flakes through the rigging to leeward. It was soon deemed expedient to close-reef the topsails; but even under these mere streaks of canvas the "Meteor" lay over to the gale with her port-holes buried, and the water bubbling in her lee scuppers. But luckily the gale was right abeam, and the vessel could hold her course; but her speed was comparatively small, and she laboured heavily.

So passed the darkest hours of the night. At four o'clock the gale was at its worst.

They had rigged up a hurricane-house in the mizzen rigging—a square of tarpaulin, which the wind flattened hard against the shrouds — and under this shelter sat Holdsworth and the captain, scarce able to hear their own voices, pitched in the loudest key, amid the howling of the tempest. Once Holdsworth went below to look at the glass, and came back saying it was steady. The skipper roared that he never before remembered so sudden a gale, and Holdsworth owned that only once was he so caught — in the Pacific, when they lost their fore-topmast.

There was nothing more to be done, unless they hove the ship to ; but this was not needful. The dawn broke at five, and the pale cheerless light illuminated a wild and dreary scene of tumbling desolate waters billowing in mountains to the

horizon. The "Meteor," almost under bare poles, her yards pointed to the gale, her ropes and lines blown in semicircles to leeward, laboured heavily, caught now by a sea that threw her on her beam-ends, and now swooping into a chasm walled with boiling green water, making the gale screech like a million steam-whistles through her rigging, as she drove up against it, while coiling tongues of water ran in cataracts up her glistening sides and fell in dead weights upon her decks. The sky, from horizon to horizon, was a dark lead colour, along which underclouds, in appearance resembling volumes of smoke, were swept along, torn and rent, and discharging at intervals quick, biting showers of rain.

Some of the passengers came on deck—the General, Mr. Holland, and Mr. St.

Aubyn. The General turned about when he had advanced a few feet, and disappeared ; Mr. Holland in a very short time followed his example ; but the actor, with manifest looks of terror in his pallid face, pushed onwards with outstretched hands for the hurricane-house. The captain advised him to go below ; but at that moment the ship, rolling suddenly to windward, shipped a shower of spray, which soaked the poor actor through and through ; a moment after, the vessel heeled heavily over to leeward ; away rolled the actor, impelled both by the wind and the unerring law of gravitation, and was flung against the lee mizzen rigging, to which he was pinned by the violence of the gale as effectually as if he had been lashed to the shrouds. He screamed for help, on which Holdsworth

went over to him, took him by the arm, and dragged him against the wind to the companion-hatchway. As Mr. St. Aubyn staggered below, clinging like a kitten to whatever he could lay hands on, he was heard to implore Holdsworth to tell him if there was any danger; but, before the words were out of his mouth, Holdsworth was clinging to the weather-rigging and calling the captain's attention to a brig, which had risen out of the sea like an apparition, and was tearing before the gale with full topsails and topgallant-sails set.

"A Yankee, by her build!" said the captain. "It's only a Yankee who would carry that sail in such a wind."

It was a sight to see her flying along, sinking her hull sometimes out of sight, then poised on the giddy summit of a

huge wave, whose crest broke under her bows, her copper bottom glistening like red gold against the slate-coloured water. She passed within a quarter of a mile of the "Meteor's" weather-beam, and up flew the stripes and stars and stood like a painted board at her peak. The second mate answered the salutation by bending on the small ensign and running it up. Any further signalling was out of the question in that gale. The men on board the brig could just be made out. She was a smart vessel, black-hulled, with bows like a knife, and skysail poles, which gave her masts an aspect of perfect symmetry ; and she was splendidly handled. She went like a swan over the seething billows, streaming a foaming wake, and in a very few moments was lost in the haze and gloom of the near horizon.

As the morning advanced the gale decreased, but a terrible sea was up, which made the ship labour so furiously that to steady her in some degree they set the trysail and foresail. There was, however, the comfort of daylight abroad, and the men could see what they were about. Both Holdsworth and the captain went below to get a little sleep, and the vessel was left in command of the second mate, a young man named Thompson. There were two hands at the wheel, and two on the look-out on the forecastle, glittering in oilcloth, and ducking now and again to the seas which swept over the ship's bows.

The fore and main hatches were battened down, and the main-deck was a foot deep in water, which washed to and fro as the ship rolled, and which, as fast as it ran

through the scupper-holes, was replaced by fresh and heavy inroads of the sea.

But all this was trifling; the vessel was snug, the gale was moderating, and the extra sail that had been made was driving the ship through the water in fine style.

Meanwhile, the passengers below, having been reassured by the captain, were making what breakfast they could off the rolls, tea, and rashers of ham which clattered about the table, and tumbled into their laps. The trays swung wildly from the deck, and it demanded great vigilance and close attention to their convulsive movements to repossess oneself of the cup or plate one placed upon them for safety. The negro steward shambled round the table, halting every moment to make a grasp at anything that came in his road,

to steady himself. Now and again you heard the smash of crockery. Some conversation was attempted; and the General invited Mr. Holland to go up on deck and witness a scene which would probably exceed in majesty Niagara Falls; but Mr. Holland said he would wait until the vessel was steadier. Mr. St. Aubyn had changed his clothes and sat holding on to the table, looking the part of fear infinitely better than he could hope to impersonate it before the footlights. The ladies remained in their cabins. Mrs. Ashton, overcome with sickness and the fear of drowning, was driving her maid distracted with orders, which it was out of the poor wretch's power to execute. In truth, the maid's legs were perfectly useless to her, which Mrs. Ashton, lying on her back, refused to understand. Cries were repeatedly coming from the

direction of her cabin for "Harry ! Harry !" which received no attention, owing to Harry's—in other words, to Mr. Ashton's—utter incapacity to move a step without being flung upon the deck.

A somewhat different scene was presented by the interior of the fore-castle, where both watches were having breakfast. Men holding tin pannikins stepped easily round to the galley, where the cook was dispensing a milkless, sugarless black fluid called tea, and retreated into the twilight of the fore-castle, carrying the steaming beverage. There sat the sailors, some swinging in hammocks with their legs dangling down, some on sea-chests, some on canvas bags, drinking from pannikins, swallowing lumps of biscuit hard as iron, or hacking with the knives they wore in their belts at bits of cold pork or beef, floating in

vinegar, in tin dishes held between their knees ; some smoking, some making ready to "turn in," and all jabbering away as gaily as if they were comfortably seated in a Liverpool or Poplar singing-house—the mariner's earthly paradise—and each with his Sue or his Betsey at his side. Here, more than in any other part of the ship, you felt her motion—the mighty lifting of her bows, and the long sweeping fall as she pitched nose under, while the heavy seas boomed against her outside as though at any moment the timbers must dispart and the green waves rush in.

At twelve o'clock the gale had decreased to such a degree that they were able to shake two reefs out of the main top-sail and set the topgallant sail. The action of the sea, moreover, was much less violent. The

weather had cleared, the pale blue sky could be seen shining through the white mist that fled along it, and the sun stood round and clean and coppery in the heavens, throwing a dark red lustre upon the quick, passionate play of the sea beneath.

Some of the passengers crawled upon deck and gazed with wonderment around them. Certainly the panorama was a somewhat different one from what had been unrolled to their eyes the day before. The ship had a fagged and jaded look with her drenched decks, her ropes blown slack with the violence of the wind, and the canvas made unequal to the eye by the reefs in the topsails. It was again Holdsworth's watch on deck. The captain walked up and down chuckling over the improved aspect of the weather and on

the wind, which was drawing more easterly, and therefore more favourable.

"You can shake out the reefs, Mr. Holdsworth. She'll bear it now," he called out.

Out reefs it was: the ship felt the increased pressure, and rushed forward like a liberated racehorse.

"This is capital!" exclaimed the old general, tottering about with outstretched hands, ever on the alert for a special roll. "A week of this, captain, will carry us a good way on our road."

"Ay, sir, and we must make up for lost time."

And then presently he gave orders to set the mainsail and the other two top-gallant sails.

"The glass still keeps low, sir," said Holdsworth.

“But let’s take advantage of the daylight, Mr. Holdsworth. We mustn’t lose an opportunity.”

The sky had now cleared, the sun shone cheerily; the wind, having drawn aft, was now no more than what sailors would call a main-royal breeze. The fore-topmast stun’sail was set. The passengers regained their spirits, and though the ship still rolled pretty freely, Mr. St. Aubyn and Mr. Holland, to show that they were now masters of their legs, walked up and down the deck, diversifying their conversation with sundry stumbles, and now and then by falling against each other. But the bright sunshine made such *contretemps* a source of merriment. Moreover, the ladies were on deck now, Mrs. Ashton having been pushed up the companion-ladder by her husband,

who, in his turn, had met with great assistance behind from the kindly hands of the negro steward, who was anxious to get them both out of the cuddy, that he might show his teeth to the maid-servant. Captain Steel seeing Mrs. Ashton attended by the other gentlemen, who were industrious in their inquiries after her nerves, gallantly gave his arm to the widow, whilst her little boy ran to Holdsworth, who took his hand, kissed and began to talk to him, finding endless pleasure in looking into his eyes and humouring the suggestions of home-life, of flowers, of woman's love, of his own wife, which were somehow conveyed to him by the boy's prattle and wise child-smiles and perfect innocence.

CHAPTER VI.

TAKEN ABACK !

AT five o'clock the wind was south-east ; a fresh breeze, with a lively sea and a cloudy sky. The wind being aft, the ship sailed on an even keel, to the great comfort of the passengers, who found the inclined decks intolerable.

From the aspect of the sea, it was evident that the ship had got into water which had not been touched by the gale of the morning—of such narrow proportions sometimes are the tempests which sweep the ocean. Away northwards, whither the

clouds were rolling, there loomed a long, low, smoke-coloured bank of cloud or fog, so exactly resembling a coast seen from a distance that the passengers were deceived, and some of them called out that yonder was land !

“ Tell us now, captain,” cried Mrs. Ashton ; “ it is land, isn’t it ? ”

“ Why, madam,” rejoined the captain, “ for anything I can tell, it may be Laputa.”

“ Or Utopia,” suggested the General, “ the land of idealisms and paradisaical institutions.”

Mrs. Ashton laughed, seeing the joke, but Mr. St. Aubyn, conceiving that they were talking of real countries, proposed that the captain should head the vessel for the shore.

“ No, no ! too far out of my course,”

answered the skipper, with a wise shake of the head. "It would make a Flying Dutchman of the ship were we once to set to work to reach that land."

"If I really thought it Utopia," said the General, stroking his moustache, "I would beg you to land me at once, so eager am I to witness the condition of a people living under a form of government the like of which for wisdom, humanity, and availability is not to be met with in any other part of the world. But it *may* be Laputa, as you suggested."

"Or Lilliput," said Mr. Holland; whereupon the actor, perceiving that a joke was playing at his expense, scowled dramatically at the bank of cloud, and muttered, that, for his part, when he asked a civil question he usually looked for a truthful answer.

Just then a voice forward shouted out, "A sail on the lee bow!"

There is always something exciting in this cry at sea. Storms and calms grow wearisome after a bit, but the interest that clusters about a vessel met on the broad deep never loses its freshness. The captain went for his telescope, and, after a brief inspection, announced the vessel to be a large barque going the same road as themselves. Mrs. Ashton asked leave to look through the telescope, and a good deal of coquettish bye-play took place; for, first she shut both eyes, and then she couldn't see at all; and then she shut the eye that looked through the telescope, and, keeping the other open, declared that she could see better without the glass. Then the telescope wouldn't keep steady; so Mr. St. Aubyn went upon his knees and

begged her to use his shoulder for a rest. At last, after an infinity of trouble, and when the cramp was just beginning to seize the actor's legs, she obtained a glimpse of the barque as it swept through the field of the glass, and owned herself delighted and satisfied.

The "Meteor" came up with the stranger hand over fist, keeping to windward of her; and soon she was no farther than a mile off, a big hull high in the water, bare and black, with round bows and a square stern. They hoisted the ensign on board the "Meteor," but the barque showed no colours.

"Some sour North Countryman, I reckon," said Captain Steel. "She has a Newcastle cut."

She was under full sail, but just when the "Meteor" got abreast of her, she clewed

her royals up, down came the flying and outer jibs, and the topgallant yards.

“What is she afraid of?” exclaimed Captain Steel, gazing at her curiously.

You could see the pigmy figures of the men clambering up the rigging, and presently down fell the topsail yards and up went more figures, and the spars were dotted with heads. Anything more picturesque than this vessel — her black hull rolling majestically, her white sails vanishing even as you watched them, her rigging marked against the cloudy sky, the sense of the noisy activity on board of her, of which no faintest echo stole across the water, and all between, the tumbling cloud-coloured waters—cannot be imagined. The crew of the “Meteor” watched her with curiosity; but she now fell rapidly astern, and in a short time could be seen clearly

only by the telescope, which Captain Steel held to his eye, speculating upon her movements.

The dinner-bell rang. It was now the first dog-watch. Thompson, the second mate, came on deck, and the passengers went to dinner. The sunlight had a watery gleam in it as the lengthening rays fell upon the skylight, and Holdsworth's eyes constantly wandered to the sails, which were visible through the glass. The skipper was in high humour, and during dinner laughed at the barque they had passed for shortening sail under a blue sky.

"I'll wager a hat," he exclaimed, "that she's commanded by a Scotchman, even if she don't hail from a North British port. I don't mean to say that your Scotchman's a timid man, but he's unco' thoughtful. My first skipper was a Sawney, and every

night, as regularly as the second dog-watch came round, it was 'In royals and flying-jib, and a single reef in the mizzen-top-sail.'"

"But there must be some reason for the barque furling her sails," said the General.

"From his point of view, no doubt, sir. You have seen what the weather has been all the afternoon?"

"The wind is dropping, sir," said Holdsworth, looking through the skylight.

He had an uneasy expression in his eyes, and he frequently glanced at the skipper; but etiquette of a very severe kind prohibited him from imparting his misgivings of a change, in the face of the skipper's manifest sense of security.

"It may freshen after sunset," rejoined the skipper. "Mr. Holland, the pleasure of a glass of wine."

The conversation drifted into other channels. Mrs. Ashton gave an account of a country ball she had attended a week or two before she left England, and described the dress she wore on that occasion, appealing often to her husband to aid her memory, and riveting the attention of Mr. St. Aubyn. Then the General talked of the garrison-towns he had visited, and paid some handsome compliments to the British army, and to English society in general. Mrs. Tennent, seated on the captain's right hand, with her boy at her side, listened to without joining in the conversation.

Holdsworth's eyes roamed incessantly through the skylight.

It happened presently that the General, in speaking of the beauty of English inland scenery, mentioned the county in which Southbourne was situated, and instanced in

particular the country around Hanwich, a town lying not half-a-dozen miles from Southbourne. Holdsworth pricked his ears, and joined in the conversation. He had reason to remember Hanwich. One of the happiest days he had spent, during the three months he had been ashore, was that in which he had driven Dolly over to that town, and dined in the queer little hotel that fronted a piece of river-scenery as beautiful as any that is to be found up the Thames.

Whilst he and the General talked, the skipper argued with Mr. St. Aubyn on the merits of the English as a paying people. St. Aubyn declared that the English public, taken in the aggregate, was a mean public, rarely liberal, and then liberal in wrong directions, supporting quack institutions, responding to quack appeals, and

ignoring true excellence, especially histrionic excellence. Both grew warm; then Mr. Holland joined in. He sent the discussion wandering from the point, and in stepped Mr. Ashton.

Meanwhile the decanters went round, the cuddy grew dark, and the negro was looking at the steward for orders to light the swinging lamps.

Hark !

A loud cry from the deck, followed by a sudden rush of feet, and the ship heeled over—over—yet over !

The women shrieked; the skylight turned black; plates, decanters, cutlery, glass, rolled from the table and fell with quick crashes. The decks fore and aft echoed with loud calls. You could hear the water gurgling in the lee port-holes. A keen blue gleam flashed upon the skylight;

but if thunder followed the lightning it was inaudible amid the wild and continuous shrieking of the wind.

The skipper and Holdsworth scrambled to the companion-ladder and gained the deck. In a trice they saw what had happened. The ship, with all sails set, had been taken aback.

Away to windward, in the direction directly contrary to where the wind had been blowing before dinner, the sky was livid, flinging an early night upon the sea, and sending forth a tempest of wind that tore the water into shreds of foam. The whole force of the hurricane was upon the ship's canvas, which lay backed against the masts, and the vessel lay on her beam-ends, her masts making an angle of forty degrees with the horizon.

The confusion was indescribable. Every

halliard had been let go; but the yards were jammed by the sails, and would not descend. The clew-lines were manned, but the sheets would not stir an inch through the blocks. Nor was the worst of the squall, tempest, hurricane, whatever it might be, upon them yet; that livid pall of cloud which the lightning was seaming with zigzag fire was still to come, and with it the full fury its scowling aspect portended.

"My God!" thundered the skipper to the second mate, who stood white, cowed, and apparently helpless, "what have you brought us into?"

The wheel was jammed hard a-starboard, but the ship lay like a log, broadside on to the wind, her masts bowed almost on a level with the water.

"Haul! for your lives, men! haul!" shrieked the skipper frantically to the men,

who appeared paralysed by the sudden catastrophe, and stood idly with the clew-lines and reef tackles passed along them.

Holdsworth, half way up the weather-poop ladder, his head above the bulwarks, saw sooner than the captain what was about to happen.

“Crowd to windward, all hands!” he roared. There was no time to say more; the great broad, livid cloud was upon them even whilst Holdsworth sang out the command; the men held their breath—unless the masts went the vessel was doomed.

Crash! A noise of wood shivered into splinters, of cracking ropes and sails thundering their tatters upon the wind; the fore and main-masts went as you would break a clay pipe-stem across your knee—the first, just below the top, the

other clean off at the deck ; and the huge mass of spars, ropes, and sails lay quivering and rolling alongside—a portion on deck, but the greater bulk of them in the water—grinding into the vessel's side as if she had grounded upon a shoal of rocks.

The ship righted, and then another crash ; away went the mizzen-topmast, leaving the spanker and cross-jack set. The wind caught these sails and swept the ship's head round right in the eye of the storm, and off she drove to leeward, disabled, helpless—dragging her shattered spars with her, like something living its torn and mangled limbs.

There was no situation in the whole range of the misfortunes which may befall a ship at sea more critical than the one the “Meteor” was now in. The sea

was rising quickly and leaping high over the ship's bows, pouring tons of water in upon the decks (the weight of the wreck alongside preventing the vessel from rising to the waves), and carrying whatever had become unlashcd—casks, spare spars, and the like — aft to the cuddy front, against which they were launched with a violence that broke the windows, and soon promised to demolish the wood-work.

But the worst part of the business was—the action of the sea set the spars in the water and the hull of the ship rolling against each other, and the thump, thump, thump of the bristly wreck against the vessel's side sent a hollow undertone through the hooting of the tempest that was awful to hear.

Though the mizzen-mast still stood,

the weight of the other masts in falling had severely wrenched it, and it literally rocked in its bed to the swaying of the great spanker-boom. Add to all this the midnight darkness in the air, which the flashes of lightning only served to deepen by the momentary and ghastly illumination they cast.

Yet, if the ship was not to be dragged to destruction, it was imperative that she should be freed, and freed at once, from the ponderous incumbrance of the wreck that ground against her side. The captain had shouted himself hoarse, and was no longer to be heard. But now Holdsworth made himself audible in tones that rose above the gale like trumpet-blasts.

“We must clear the wreck or founder! All hands out with their knives and cut away everything!”

A comprehensive order that must be literally obeyed.

“Carpenter !” he roared.

“Here, sir,” came a voice from the main-deck.

Holdsworth sprang in the direction of the voice : shouted again, and the man was at his side.

“Quick ! Where’s your tool chest ? Bear a hand, now !”

The two men fought their way through the water that came drenching and flying over the forecastle, to the boatswain’s berth, which the carpenter shared ; and in a few moments returned staggering aft with their arms full of tools, which they thrust into the hands of the men. Holdsworth seized an adze ; the carpenter another ; and to it fell all hands, feeling for the ropes and then letting drive at them.

The mere occupation heartened the men, who worked with a will, bursting into encouraging cheers from time to time and calling to each other incessantly. The lightning was so far useful that it enabled them to obtain glimpses of the progress they made. The starboard shrouds lay across the deck, from bulwark to bulwark, like bridges; these were the first that were dealt with. They kept the wreck close alongside, and the strain upon them was enormous. Whilst Holdsworth and the carpenter hacked, they repeatedly called to a few of the men whose zeal kept them working on the lee side, though their figures could not be seen, to stand clear, wisely guessing that after a few of the shrouds had been severed, the whole would part like a rope-yarn: and this happened. One final blow divided a shroud and left the weight upon

a few others, which were unequal to support it; and as they flew some shrill screams rose; a man had been caught by the flying shrouds round the body and whirled overboard like dust. But in the darkness none could tell who the messmate was that had lost his life.

The parting of these shrouds released the wreck from the ship's side, and it drifted some fathoms away. The horrible grinding sounds ceased; but still the masts and yards, which the lightning disclosed seething in the water, black, ugly, and as dangerous as a lee-shore, were attached to the hull by a network of rope, all which must be severed. The knives of the men cut and hacked in all directions; and first here and then there, and sometimes as if crashing in half-a-dozen places at once,

the adze wielded by Holdsworth was to be heard.

The last shroud was at length severed, the last rope parted ; the hull, drifting faster than the dead weight of wreck, fell astern of the horrible incumbrance, and the next flash of lightning showed the water boiling round the black spars ahead.

“ Hurrah ! ” shouted Holdsworth ; but the men, wearied and faint after their long and great struggle, and sickened by the shriek of their perishing comrade, whose cries still sounded in their ears, answered the encouraging shout faint-heartedly.

The ocean was still a black and howling wilderness, and the vessel plunged and rolled, and trembled in the jumping seas, with her head right in the wind’s eye, and the water pouring over her in sheets of undulating fire. The water had stove

in the cuddy front, and was washing in tons down into the steerage. What they had now to do was to furl the cross-jack; aft came the men and clewed the sail up; on which the vessel fell broadside to the wind and rolled her bulwarks under water.

To furl the cross-jack was a job full of peril; but, if the thing was to be done at all, it was to be done by a *coup de main*. Holdsworth, crying to the hands to follow him, sprang up the port mizzen rigging. Half-a-dozen went up after him, the rest skulked in the darkness, and stood holding their breath, expecting every moment the crash that should fling the men aloft into the sea. No glimpse of the brave fellows was to be obtained; nothing but the flapping outline of the white sail could be seen; the mast creaked harshly; but from time to time the men's voices could

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be heard even above the roar of the tempest, the groaning of the ship, and the rolling of spare casks, a sheep-pen which had become unlashd, and other things about the waist and quarter-deck ; and slowly the faint spaces of thundering canvas vanished in the darkness, and were securely stowed.

Meanwhile, the hands about the poop had been sent to man the pumps. The carpenter had sounded the well and reported three feet of water in the hold.

"She must be tight, sir! I am sure she is tight, sir! She has shipped the water that's in her through the mast-coat of the main-mast!" the skipper shouted to Holdsworth, who stood, panting from his exertions aloft, close against the mizzen - mast, that he might judge what chance there was of its standing.

huge black groups, with spaces of clear sky between, and the wind was lulling as rapidly as it had risen.

The ship was still buoyant enough to rise easily over the seas; but anything more forlorn than her appearance, as it was disclosed by the dim light that fell from the rifts among the clouds, cannot be imagined.

The fore-mast stood like a black and lightning-shattered tree; the jib-boom hung in two pieces from the bowsprit; where the main-mast had stood were some huge jagged splinters; and aft towered the mizzen-mast, with the cross-jack* swinging to the roll of the ship, the spanker with its peak halliards gone, and the whole picture of it completing the unutterable air of

* Pronounced "cro'jack."

desolation presented by the storm-shattered vessel.

At eight bells the carpenter reported no increase of the water in the hold, which cheering intimation the captain delivered to the men from the break of the poop, who received it with a faint cheer.

The pumps had been relieved three times, and now the port watch was at them, making the water bubble on to the deck, where it was washed to and fro, and poured in streams through the scupper-holes.

At one o'clock, Holdsworth, who had been on deck since a quarter to seven, went below to put on dry clothes; and as he was leaving his cabin to return on deck he met Mrs. Tennent. Her face was very pale in the light of the swinging lamp, and she stood at her cabin door,

by the handle of which she supported herself.

"Are we not in great danger, Mr. Holdsworth?" she whispered, in a tone of deep excitement.

"The worst is passed, I hope," answered Holdsworth cheerfully.

"Do not be afraid of telling me the truth. I can be brave for my child's sake. If real danger should come, Mr. Holdsworth, will you remember him? Will you be near him in that moment?"

"We won't talk of danger yet, Mrs. Tennent. We have had an ugly bout of it, but the daylight is coming, and then we shall be more comfortable."

"Many times," she exclaimed, "I thought we were sinking! Oh, God! what a horrible night this has been! I heard the water rushing past the cabin door, and I

tried to reach the deck, but was too faint to carry my child, and I could not leave him."

"Well, you see we are still afloat," Holdsworth answered cheerily. "Depend upon it, we will do our best to save the ship. Take my advice and lie down and get some sleep. This water here," pointing to the cuddy-deck, "means nothing; a mop will put that to rights. The morning is coming, and you are sailing under a skipper who knows what he is about."

He waved his hand cordially, and left her.

All through that long night the hands stuck to the pumps, but the water gained upon them inch by inch, and when the morning broke at last, the vessel was deep

and heavy, rolling sluggishly, and leaking fast.

The sun was a welcome sight to the poor fagged seamen. Up he sprang, flushing the universe with a pink splendour, and dispersing the heavy clouds that hung in clusters about his rising-point.

Up to that time there had been a fresh breeze blowing, the dregs, so to speak, of the storm that had dismantled the ship; but this lulled as the sun rose, the sea smoothed out its turbulent waves, and a day filled with the promise of calm and beauty broke on a scene as desolate as any the heart can conceive.

One of the watches was in the fore-castle; half the other watch on deck was at the pumps, the monotonous sounds of which had been echoing many hours, together with the gushing of water surging over

the decks, and pouring in streams from the ship's sides.

The vessel was now no more than a log on the water; not a shred of canvas, with the exception of the mutilated spanker upon her, her port bulwarks crushed, her fore-mast a stump, her decks exhibiting a scene of wild disorder—loose spars that had been washed from forward incumbering the entrance of the cuddy; the cuddy front battered to pieces, spare casks piled tumultuously about the poop-ladders, and the long-boat, lashed between the galley and the fore-mast, and which had held some of the live stock, full of water and drowned sheep. On the port side, the severed shrouds, which had supported the masts, trailed their black lengths in the sea; and all about the starboard side were the fragments of ropes and stays hacked and

torn to pieces ; while the port main-chains had received a wrench that had torn the bolts out of the ship's side, and left the irons standing out.

As yet none of the passengers had made their appearance. The captain had brought a chart from his cabin and unrolled it upon the skylight and stood with his finger upon it, calculating his whereabouts by yesterday's reckoning, and waiting for Holdsworth to return from the hold, which he and the carpenter were exploring for the leak.

The swell, which was heavy, surged against the ship's sides ; but her buoyancy was gone, she hardly moved to the pressure.

Presently Holdsworth came out of the hold, wet and exhausted, followed by the carpenter in worse plight.

" Well ? " exclaimed the captain, in a subdued but eager voice.

"I am afraid it is a hopeless case, sir. She's leaking in a dozen different places."

"The worst leak is just amidships," said the carpenter. "It's under the water in the hold. You can hear it bubbling, but there's no getting at it."

"What soundings have you got?"

"Eleven feet, sir!"

"Good God!" cried the skipper; "that's an increase of a foot and a half since seven bells."

"We had better look to the boats, sir," said Holdsworth, scanning the horizon.

"Don't talk of the boats yet, sir!" panted the skipper. "Clap some backstays on to the fore-mast and turn to and rig up the spare staysail."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Holdsworth, and went forward to call all hands and make what sail they could upon the stump of the

fore-mast, whilst the skipper walked passionately to and fro, perfectly conscious of the hopelessness of their situation, but determined to blind his eyes to it.

The first among the passengers to come on deck was the General, who stood transfixed by the spectacle of the wreck. He and some of the others had attempted during the night to leave their berths and find out the reason of the uproar that was going on over their heads, but had been literally blown back again the moment they showed their noses above the hatchway ; and none of them, with the exception of Mrs. Tennent, having had an opportunity of speaking to either the captain or Holdsworth, they were all in perfect ignorance that the vessel was actually a wreck.

Whilst the General stood gasping and staring up aloft in search of the majestic

masts and sails that had reared their graceful heights when he was last on deck, he was joined by Mr. St. Aubyn and Mr. Holland, both of whom turned pale with amazement and fear.

Then all three of them ran up to the captain.

"Oh, tell us what has happened? What will become of us? Are we sinking?" cried the actor.

"Where are the masts gone? Is it possible that we can ever reach America in this condition?" gasped Mr. Holland.

"Captain, we seem to be in a frightful mess! Why, we are foundering, sir!" exclaimed the General, rolling his eyes over the sea and then fixing them upon the captain.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" returned the skipper, extending his hands, "pray leave

me! You distract me by your questions."

"Are we in danger?" implored Mr. St. Aubyn.

"Yes, sir; can't you see?" answered the skipper fiercely.

"Is it possible!" stammered Mr. St. Aubyn, turning deadly pale.

"It is possible!" cried the skipper scornfully. "But I hope you are not going to be afraid, sir. Look over the break of the poop and you'll see the men pumping for their lives. Danger is one thing, and drowning is another. I beg, sir, that you will control your fears. Panics are easily created, and you will remember, please, that we have women among us."

Saying which he walked some paces away. Mr. St. Aubyn burst into tears; Mr. Holland gazed around him with an

air of stupefaction ; the General followed the skipper.

“Is our position really serious?”

“Yes, General ; the ship’s bottom is leaky fore and aft.”

“What do you mean to do?”

“Keep her afloat as long as I can. And now will you do me a service? Go and clap that snivelling actor on the back and put some heart in him. One coward makes many, and this is no time for any man on board my ship who values his life at one farthing to lose his pluck.”

By this time the hands forward had lashed a block on the stump of the fore-mast, and run up a spare staysail. Holdsworth then came aft to the poop. The captain called him to the skylight, and they hung together over the chart, calculating their neighbourhood, and de-

vising expedients in subdued tones. The men who were far enough forward to see them as they stood together on the poop eyed them curiously, and held muttering conversations together, some of them going to the ship's side and looking over.

It was felt by every man among them that the vessel was sinking ; and those who worked the pumps plied languidly, as though understanding the fruitlessness of their labour.

Mrs. Tennent came on deck with her boy and stood near Holdsworth, asking no questions, but with an expression on her face that plainly showed her conscious of the danger and prepared for the worst. Soon afterwards came Mrs. Ashton, who shrieked out when she beheld the dismasted hull, and clung convulsively to her husband. Her maid followed her,

shivering, cowed, with big eyes staring everywhere like a madwoman's.

Then a dead silence fell upon the ship, disturbed only by the languid clanking of the pumps and the fall of the continuous streams of water over the ship's sides.

It was now half-past eight o'clock. Not a breath of air rippled the surface of the sea, which rose and sunk to a deep and voluminous under-swell. Some heavy clouds hung motionless in the blue sky, from one of which a shower of rain was falling about a mile off, arching a little brilliant rainbow upon the water.

Presently Holdsworth advanced to the poop-rail and sung out to the carpenter to sound the bell. This was done, and the report showed that the ship was making water at the rate of a foot an hour.

On this announcement all heart went out

of the captain like a flash, and left him silent and spiritless.

He rallied, went to Holdsworth's side and called out : "Belay that pumping there ! Boatswain, send all hands aft to the quarter-deck."

The sound of the pumping ceased, the men came aft in groups and stood in a crowd.

Some of them were bearded, some quite young ; their attire was various but always picturesque : here a red shirt, there white, here blue serge, there coarse canvas, many with bare brown arms ringed with tattoo-marks ; some in sea-boots, some with naked feet. The bright sun gleamed upon their upturned faces, pale for want of sleep and with the intense weariness of their long and heavy labours. There was no want of respect suggested by any of them ; but, on

the contrary, there was a rough and sympathetic deference in their manner and gaze as they fixed their eyes on their white-haired skipper and listened to his speech, which he delivered in a voice that now and then faltered.

“My men, I had hoped to keep our poor old hull afloat by manning the pumps day and night and head for home, which, with a breeze astern of us, we might have reached even in the trim the gale last night has put us in. But I find that the water is gaining upon us faster than we can pump it out, and it's not my intention to fag you with useless work. But in this sea the hull is likely to float for some hours yet; so we shall have plenty of time to get the boats out and do the best we can for our lives. You are most of you Englishmen, and those who are not are all brave fellows, and no

man can be better than that, let him hail from what port he may : so I can depend upon you turning to and obeying orders quietly. There are thirty-four souls aboard of us and four boats ; there's room for thirteen in the long-boat, and for seven apiece in the quarter-boats. I'll take charge of the long-boat, your chief mate of the pinnace, and the second mate and boatswain will take the others. There's no hurry, and there must be no confusion. Let a dozen hands man the pumps, the rest go to breakfast and then relieve the pumps. Then tumble aft, get the long-boat launched, and do the best we can for ourselves ; and may God preserve us. Amen."

At the conclusion of this speech the men raised a cheer, the boatswain's pipe shrilled, clang went the pumps again, and the quarter-deck was deserted.

The captain turned to the passengers.

“Ladies and gentlemen, these are ugly straits for me to have brought you into, and I would that God in His mercy had ordained it otherwise. I have been forty years at sea, and the like of this has never befallen me before. But that’s no matter. I’ll take care to do my duty by you to the last. We have got enough boats to accommodate us all comfortably; the weather promises fair, and it’s odds if every one of us isn’t snug and safe on board some ship before to-night; for we’re right in the track of homeward-bound ships from the United States. Some of you will come with me, and some go along with my chief officer, who has worked nobly for us all, and who’ll work as nobly right away through for those who are with him whilst the life is in his body. Ladies, keep up your courage; for a

sinking ship is a small matter when you've got good boats, and are with men who know how to handle 'em. We'll go below now and make as good a breakfast as we can ; we'll then provision the boats and put off, as sure as our hearts can make us that God's eye, which is everywhere, will not lose sight of us."

There were some murmurs, and then a silence, which Mrs. Ashton broke by bursting into a passion of tears. When she was in some measure calmed, the General said:

"Fellow-passengers, will you unite with me in a prayer to our merciful God for His protection?"

The men took off their hats, but the captain exclaimed:

"General, there are hands for'ard who might like to join us. We should give them the chance."

Holdsworth went to the fore-castle, and presently returned with the whole ship's company following him. The hands at the pump ceased their work to gather round the capstan, and the passengers attended the skipper in a body to the quarter-deck. The old General stood in the midst of the crowd, and knelt—an example followed by the rest.

There was something too sacred in the nature of the extemporaneous prayer offered up by the General to make it proper for me to write it down here; but its effect was deeply impressive. Noble, beyond the power of words to describe, was the spectacle of the fine old American, bare-headed and kneeling, his trembling hands clasped, his kindly, honest face up-turned to the skies, breathing forth in broken tones an earnest entreaty that God,

in His infinite mercy, would look down upon His servants now and grant them His all-powerful protection in this their hour of danger and suffering. Equally affecting was the spectacle of the men—some with hands clasped before their faces, some kneeling with reverently-bowed heads, some gazing with earnest eyes upon the petitioner, and some even weeping—not unmanly tears — those who wept were among the bravest. The widow knelt with her arms about her child's neck, in an attitude both shielding and imploring. The husband and wife prayed hand-in-hand.

Overhead shone the joyous sun; the long and polished swell surged against the sluggish vessel's side; and amidst the tones of the old General and the solemn murmur of those who followed

his words, you might hear the gurgling of the water in the hold, and feel the ship's growing weight and helplessness in the heavy and weary rolls she gave to the movement of the sea.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE BOATS.

By twelve o'clock they had baled the long-boat out and got her over the ship's side, a task of no small difficulty, since, the main-mast being gone, they had no means of slinging her. The other boats were also lowered, each with a hand in her, and hung in a group about the port side of the ship, where the bulwarks were smashed.

Each boat was properly supplied with mast, sail, and oars; also with water, biscuits, some rum in bottles, &c. They looked mere cockle-shells alongside the

great hull, and it seemed difficult to realise that they would sustain among them the weight of the crowd of men who stood by ready to jump into them.

The ship was settling fast. They had left off pumping her some time since, and she had now sunk a great hole under her port fore-chains to a level with the water, which gushed in like a cascade.

Mrs. Ashton was the first to be handed out of the ship. She screamed and hung back, and threw her hands out to her husband; but the men, raising her firmly in their arms, offering her the while certain rough and hearty encouragements, passed her over the ship's side to the sailors in the boats, who deposited her in the long-boat. The widow, at her own request, was assigned to Holdsworth's boat. They handed her boy over first, and then she followed and

seated herself in the stern-sheets, holding her child tightly.

Then rose a cry of "Bear a hand! the ship will founder!"

Mrs. Ashton's maid was passed out quickly, and then the passengers; the actor and the General getting into Holdsworth's boat, the others into the long-boat. After this, the seamen, feeling the imminence of the danger, tumbled rapidly into the boats; and then Holdsworth quitted the ship, followed by the captain.

"Shove off!" shouted the boatswain, who commanded one of the quarter-boats.

Out flashed the oars: the boats parted and stood aloof from the hull at a distance of about three hundred feet.

It is impossible to describe the mingled emotions of dismay, curiosity, and breathless suspense with which the men awaited the

sinking of the hull. There was not a soul among them who felt privileged to depart until the vessel, so noble once, so desolate and broken now, had sunk to her long home in the deep Atlantic. Something absolutely of human pathos that appealed to the heart, as the distress of a living thing might, seemed mixed up in the aspect of unutterable desolation she presented, the more defined and keen because of the mocking joyousness of the sunlight that streamed over her, and the fair and azure surface of the sea on which she rested. Her figure-head, uninjured by the gale—as perfect a piece of workmanship as ever graced a vessel's bows—might, by no violent fantasy, have been deemed the spirit of the ship poising herself an instant ere she soared towards the sky. The two sails upon her flapped hollowly to her roll, and

once there came from her silent deck a sound as of a bell being struck, which filled the listening sailors with awe, and set them bending superstitious glances in search of the Shadow that was tolling the ship's funeral knell.

All on a sudden the hull lurched in the direction of the boats and exposed her sloping decks. "She's going now!" cried one of the men. This was true. Down sank her stern slowly, so slowly that many seconds passed ere her stern-windows were on a level with the water. She righted, and her bows, high raised, pointed the shattered jib-boom aloft, as though in her last agony she raised her mangled limbs to heaven. She then sunk stern foremost, the deepest tragical dignity attending her descent: the silence unbroken, save by the sullen gurgling and bubbling of the water

forcing itself through her decks. Her stern disappeared ; then her bows stood black on the water ; they vanished, and the fore-mast with the sail upon it alone remained visible. Lower and lower these crept, but still it was possible to trace the undulating outline of the hull in the clear water. The sponge-like sail sucked up the water quicker than it sank, and arched a brown shadow upon its snow ; then the jagged top of the fore-mast only was to be seen ; this vanished, and the boats were left alone upon the mighty surface of the deep.

A deep silence prevailed among the men while she was sinking ; and not for some moments after she had disappeared did the spell upon them break, and a long and tremulous sigh escaped them.

Then the captain's voice in the long-boat was heard :

“Mr. Holdsworth, our course is south-east. Every boat has a compass aboard of her. Now, my men, up with your masts ; we may get a breeze before sundown. And, meanwhile, out with your oars and make what way we can towards the old country !”

The stout-hearted fellows answered with a cheer ; in all four boats they shipped the masts ; out went the oars, and the water bubbled round the stems.

The men were right to cheer. God knows they needed what encouragement each other's voice could give them.

What pen shall describe the overwhelming sense of the immensity of the sea, now that its surface could be touched by the hand—its huge presence so close ! That sense alone was a weight that oppressed the hearts of the passengers like

death. The height of a large ship from the edge of the water implanted a habit of security ; but here, they overhung the deep by an arm's length, and near enough to see their own pale faces mirrored in the green abyss from which they were separated by planks not much stouter than the sole of a boot.

There were in Holdsworth's boat : himself, Mrs. Tennent and her boy, Mr. St. Aubyn, the General, and two seamen—Winyard and Johnson ; in all, seven souls. The long-boat, in the distance, looked crowded ; but then she was the largest of the boats. Astern of her rowed the boat commanded by the boatswain ; astern of Holdsworth's, the boat commanded by Mr. Thompson, the second mate.

There could be no purpose gained by rowing, for, let them ply the oars as

hard as they would, they could not urge the heavy boats faster than three miles an hour. Holdsworth steered for the long-boat, and proposed to the captain that they should lay their oars in and wait for a breeze; which was agreed to. The sun shone hot upon the glassy sea, and the boats hoisted their sails as a protection against the rays. And forever the men bent earnest and anxious glances round the bare and polished horizon for a sail.

In Holdsworth's boat the two seamen sat forward, talking together in low voices; Mr. St. Aubyn reclined with his back against the mast, glancing incessantly about him with quick, scared eyes, but quite silent, as though the novelty and horror of the situation was more than his mind could receive, and he was labour-

ing to master it. The General's face was placid, and even hopeful. The widow, holding her son at her side, kept her eyes bent downwards, and often her lips moved.

In the other boats the men talked, and often called to one another. Their voices sounded forced and unreal as the tones floated across the water, and in a strange manner heightened the unspeakable sense of solitude inspired by the boundless and tenantless deep.

For some time the little boy appeared to share in the feelings which held all but the two sailors in Holdsworth's boat silent; but he presently grew restless, and pulling his mother by the skirt, asked her in a whisper when the ship was coming back to take them on board again.

"Another ship will come and take us

soon, pray God, Louis," answered the mother.

"But where is our ship, mamma?"

Holdsworth overheard the question, and answered in his hearty, cheery manner:

"Look well about you, Louis, and, by-and-by, you will see a tiny spot of white rise somewhere on that clear circle," pointing round the horizon, "and that will be our ship coming to take us home."

"Oh, Mr. Holdsworth!" said the actor, in a faint voice, "if the wind rises, will not the water get into our boat and sink it?"

"Not if I can help it, sir. I am waiting for the wind to rise. There is no chance of a rescue in this calm."

"Though we should be grateful for this calm," exclaimed the General, "for it has

enabled us all to leave the sinking ship in safety."

"I have lost my all in that ship—all the money I had in the world, and my clothes, and things that were priceless to me," moaned Mr. St. Aubyn.

The widow raised her head, and exclaimed, "I too have lost much that was precious, and which no money could ever purchase. But, so far, God has watched over us and preserved our lives, and I can well spare all else—all else—if He will but leave me this treasure." She wept as she bowed her head over her child.

"Let us not murmur, Mr. St. Aubyn," said the General softly, "but call upon Him who rebuked the winds and waves in the sea of Galilee, and calmed them. Have not we His disciples' faith? He is

in our midst, watching over us, even as we sit now. This ocean is but the symbol of His majesty and might: His servant who will bear us safely on its bosom at its Lord's command. Our Saviour sleeps not, neither will He forsake us. We forget Him when we yield to our fears."

"Thank you for those words, sir," said the man named Johnson. "God don't forget those who are at sea any more than those who stop on shore. I have been worse off nor this, sir, lashed to a raft for forty-eight hours, and here I am to tell the story. Begging your pardon, sir," he added, touching his cap, and drawing back respectfully.

By this time the boats had drifted some distance apart; but the voices talking in them could still be heard with the utmost

clearness, so exquisite a vehicle of sound is the smooth surface of water.

It was one o'clock by Holdsworth's watch when they beheld the horizon in the east darkening, under what resembled the shadow of a cloud, and the voice of a man in the long-boat came across the water, crying, "A breeze at last, my boys!"

It was a light breeze, and moved very slowly, but it filled the sails and sent the boats rippling gently through the water. As it came foul of the course the skipper meant to take, they lay as close to it as they could; and eyes were strained in its direction for the welcome sail, some of them whispered, it might bring along with it. Some white clouds came up, and as they soared about the horizon, they so closely resembled the sails of ships that even Holdsworth's experienced eye was deceived,

and he gazed intently with a beating heart.

The breeze freshened, and the unequal sailing qualities of the boats manifested themselves. The long-boat drew ahead rapidly; Holdsworth's came next; the other two fell astern. The wind, though in reality light, seemed tolerably strong, owing to the boats sailing close to it. Holdsworth's boat lay over, which terrified St. Aubyn, and made him cling to the weather-gunwale.

"You're afeard rather early, sir," said one of the seamen—Winyard—sarcastically.

"The boat will turn over!" gasped the actor.

Indeed his fear and despair were pitiable, and had not only dulled his eyes, but pinched and thinned his face as though he were fresh from a sick bed.

"Take a pull at this," said Holdsworth,

offering him some rum, and heartily commiserating the man's sufferings. But St. Aubyn shook his head, and gazed with distended eyes at the water, shivering repeatedly, and sometimes talking to himself.

In order to let the hinder boats come up, the long-boat ahead from time to time stopped her way by putting her helm down, which example Holdsworth regularly followed; and so they sailed throughout the whole afternoon, the breeze remaining steady and the sea smooth.

The boat commanded by Holdsworth was about twenty-seven feet long, with seven feet or thereabouts of beam. There was a locker aft, which had been filled with small bags of bread, as they call biscuits at sea; and forward were one small and two large kegs of water, and a tin pannikin to serve

out the allowances with. At the bottom of the boat was a set of gratings, meant to keep the feet clear of any water that might be shipped, with a well convenient to get at, and half a cocoa-nut-shell with a handle let into it, to bale the boat with. The boat was new, stoutly built, and rigged with a lug-sail. A small compass had been put in her, and Holdsworth had lashed it carefully to a thwart. This was the only nautical instrument they had with them, and unless they could guess their whereabouts, it would not, after a time, be of much service.

They had during the afternoon ascertained the quantity of provisions and water they carried, and discovered that there was enough to last for about ten days, providing each person had no more than two biscuits, and a quarter full of the pannikin of water,

a day. They had also three bottles of rum. The first allowance was served out by Holdsworth at five o'clock in the afternoon. A biscuit was handed to each person ; the little boy and the two seamen ate theirs hungrily : the General and Holdsworth nibbled only a portion of theirs : but Mrs. Tennent and the actor ate nothing. The mother gave half her biscuit to her boy, and put the other half in her pocket for him to eat during the night. The actor refused his allowance altogether, and Holdsworth returned it to the bag he had taken it from.

All the other boats remained in sight ; the long-boat ahead, and the other two at unequal distances astern. From time to time they encouraged each other by waving their hats ; and just before sunset some of the men in the long-boat struck

up a hymn, the chorus of which stole faintly across the breeze, and mingled with the bubbling play of the water round the boat's bows.

The sun went down, branding the great ocean with an angry glare ; but nothing was visible upon either horizon but the deceptive tail-ends of clouds rising or dwindling. The breeze grew stronger as the darkness crept on, and they lowered the sail and took a couple of reefs in it, whilst there was light enough abroad for them to see what they were about. They soon lost sight of the other boats, and Holdsworth, finding the wind drawing ahead, put the boat round, judging that the others would do so likewise.

Now, if at no other time, was the sense of the profound helplessness of their position forced upon them. It is easy to write and

read of an open boat far out in the Atlantic Ocean, and darkness around; but none save those who have experienced the situation can realise all the horror of it. Waves which would scarcely more than ripple against the sides of a ship, make a dangerous sea for an open boat, and arch their seething heads over her with a threat in every one of them of destruction.

But *the* overpowering sensation is the near presence of the sea. Your feet are below its surface; your head but an arm's length above it. And you hear the quick splash of the boat's bows as she jumps awkwardly into the hollows of the waves, wobbling as she goes forward with jerks and many stoppages, while now and again the sea chucks a handful of spray into your eyes as an earnest of the way it means to deal

with you presently, when the wind has made it more angry.

The stars came out and shone placidly among the clouds which were rolling away to the north-west. There was a short quick sea, which made the boat dip uncomfortably, and now and again whisked a sheet of spray over the seamen who sat forward. But there was more south than east in the breeze, which kept the temperature of the night mild. The little boy fell asleep in his mother's arms; Mr. St. Aubyn reclined against the mast, his arms folded, and his head drooping on his breast, starting at intervals as the spray fell like a shower of rain in the boat, but speedily relapsing again into the sluggish, or semi-unconscious state into which he had fallen shortly after the sun had gone down. The General and Holdsworth sometimes con-

versed. Presently Winyard, turning his coat collar over his ears, slipped under the thwart, where he coiled himself like a cat, and went to sleep.

"I wish I could induce you to lie down, Mrs. Tennent," said Holdsworth. "My coat will make you a capital pillow. I don't want it indeed. I have slept on deck in my shirt-sleeves in colder nights than this. I shan't put the boat about again to-night if this wind holds, and you will lie with your boy alongside of you as snugly as possible upon this seat."

She thanked him, but said it would be useless for her to lie down; she should not be able to sleep.

"You have eaten nothing all day," said the General; "you must not allow your strength to fail you. Pray try to eat a little biscuit."

Holdsworth handed her a biscuit, and she broke a piece of it off and appeared to munch it ; but in the darkness they could not tell how little she eat.

No sign was to be seen of the other boats, although once Holdsworth imagined he heard a voice halloing a long way to windward. The boat's head was now pointing east-north-east ; but she lay close to the wind and made scarcely more than four knots an hour. The jump of the sea deadened her way materially ; but this jump decreased as the night wore on, for the waves grew longer, with steadier intermissions. At twelve o'clock, Holdsworth, who was worn out by his long spell at the helm, called to Johnson to awaken Winyard. Up jumped the seaman from the bottom of the boat and came aft. Holdsworth gave him the

yoke-lines, and, bidding Johnson lie down and get some rest, seated himself on the lee-side of the mast and scanned the sea to right and left of him. The old General had fallen asleep right along the thwart on which he sat, his face buried in his arm. The boy slept soundly in his mother's arms, but whether she slumbered or not, Holdsworth could not tell. Once Mr. St. Aubyn started up as from a nightmare, muttered some broken sentences, and was silent again.

"Keep her close," said Holdsworth to Winyard, "and watch the seas."

"You had best take some rest, sir. I can handle the boat whilst you're down."

"No. I'll wait until Johnson has had his nap."

So passed two hours.

It was drawing near half-past two in the

morning when Winyard called, in a loud whisper :

“Master, isn’t that a ship to windward, there?”

No one in the boat heard him but Holdsworth. He jumped up and peered into the starlit gloom ahead, where, sure enough, the outline of a dark shadow could be traced, though only by looking on one side of it.

“Yes, that’s a ship!” he answered hoarsely; “but she’s too far to windward to hear our shouts. Have we any lights aboard of us? Quick!”

He pulled the General, who leaped up, rubbing his eyes.

“Have you any matches about you?”

“No—what is it?”

“There’s a ship yonder! I could souse my handkerchief in rum and set fire to it. Hi! Mr. St. Aubyn! feel if you have

a match in your pockets." But the actor answered with a stupefied stare, whereupon Holdsworth searched his pockets without avail.

Johnson was awake, standing up in the bows, with his arms lifted.

"Ship ahoy!" roared Holdsworth. One might have thought the voice deep and powerful enough to have carried twice the distance of that gliding shadow.

They waited breathlessly; but no sound was returned.

"Altogether, now!" shouted Holdsworth; "one, two, three—ship ahoy!"

The united voices sounded like a shriek of death-agony rising out of the ebony-coloured deep; but no faintest response was brought back by the wind.

"Oh God!" raved Winyard, "they'd see us if we could only show a light!"

"She is running before the wind," cried Johnson; "she's passing us!"

"Put your helm up!" roared Holdsworth. "We'll follow her. She may hear us when we get her to leeward."

They let go the halliards, shook the reefs out of the sail, and set it again, slackening the sheet far out. The boat headed for the visionary shadow, which was fast fading in the universal gloom, and the foam boiled under and alongside of her.

"Altogether again!" sang out Holdsworth.

Once more went forth the loud, despairing chorus, to be followed by silence. They might as well have attempted to chase a cloud. Keen as the sailors' eyes were, they could no longer perceive the shadow.

"Never mind!" exclaimed Holdsworth cheerily, "there may be others near us; we'll keep a sharp look-out."

"She may fall in with one of the other boats," said Johnson, "and, maybe, she'll cruise about to find us."

The chill of disappointment passed, and they grew hopeful. The mere fact of having sighted a ship imparted a new encouragement.

"We should be in the track of outward-bounders," said Holdsworth. "Give us a hand here, Johnson, to take these reefs in. Bring her close again, Winyard. Pray God we shall be telling of this night on good oak decks by noon to-morrow."

The little boy, who had been awakened by the halloing of the men, shivered, crept closer to his mother's side, and fell asleep again.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND DAY.

“MR. HOLDSWORTH,” said the General, “will you not let me watch whilst you get some sleep. You have been up now for nearly three nights running, and I beg you to consider the preciousness of your life to us all.”

“I am much obliged to you, General. I’ll do as you ask me. Johnson, come aft and relieve Winyard here. Keep a sharp look-out, my lads, and wake me up if the breeze freshens.” He seated himself in the bottom of the boat, rested his head upon a

thwart, and in a few moments was fast asleep.

A hush fell upon the boat which nothing broke but the quick angry sousing of the bows as the boat fell with her short length into the trough of the sea. The widow had fallen asleep at last, and leaned against Johnson, who steered, whilst her boy slumbered with his head on her lap. The sailor sat motionless for fear of waking her, calling once in a whisper to Winyard to come aft and look at the little 'un, and tell him if he thought that God would let such innocence be drowned.

"He's the image of my little Bill," answered Winyard, stooping his bearded face low that he might see the child's features. "I'm glad the poor lady's sleeping. Keep steady, Dick, or you'll wake her. She ain't tasted a mossil of food all this blessed day,

and it 'ud cut me to the heart to see the little 'un left without a mother."

"Ay, and so it would me, Harry. May be we'll sight a ship to-morrow. I've got my old woman to keep ashore, and I guess, when rent-time comes, she won't know what to do, unless I get back."

"I wish I had some 'baccy with me. Ain't got a bit in all my pockets. I wonder where t'other boats have got to?"

The conversation, which had been carried on in hoarse whispers, was at this point interrupted by a movement of the little boy. Johnson raised his hand and Winyard crept forward, where he sat like a block of stone, watching the horizon.

It was about four o'clock, as the seamen guessed, when the wind, which had been pretty steady from the south-east, lulled, and then veering northward came on to

blow freshly. The men 'awakened Holdsworth, who went to the helm. Mrs. Tennent, who had been aroused by the withdrawal of the sailor's shoulder, shivered with the cold and crouched down to hug herself in her clothes. Indeed, the north wind was cold enough; but Holdsworth observing the woman's condition, whipped off his coat without a word and buttoned it over her shoulders, silencing her protests by kindly laughter and encouraging words.

The change of wind produced a cross sea which drenched the boat and made her movements horribly uncomfortable. The wind increased, bringing up large clouds, each of which was charged with a small rain-loaded squall of its own. The sea rose, and matters began to wear an ugly look. The men close-reefed the sail, and Holdsworth finding that the boat shipped

water when on the wind, let her go free ; and away they scudded with a breeze growing in force every five minutes astern of them. The utmost vigilance was now needful in steering the boat. The waves were quick and irritable, and broke in noisy surfaces of foam on either gunwale, and from time to time it seemed inevitable that their curling crests must arch themselves clean into the boat and swamp her. Holdsworth parried them with the rudder like a fencer with a foil. His eye was marvelously quick, the movements of his hands subtle and unerring. What the waves were to that small open boat, the seas of the Pacific under a westerly gale are to a full-rigged ship. She sunk into hollows half-mast deep, where the air was stagnant, behind and before her black walls of illuminated water, the hinder ones of which,

catching her under the stern, raised her with irresistible force to a height that turned her inmates giddy and sick ; and there, exposed to the wind, her sail blew out to cracking limits and hurled her madly forward—to sink into a new abysm, to experience another interval of breathless, deadly calm.

“ May God have mercy upon us ! ” exclaimed the General, in one of these awful intervals, folding his arms tightly and fixing his eyes on a towering sea rearing astern of them like a hill.

But Holdsworth’s voice echoed cheerily : “ She is a brave boat, General ; and it’s not my intention to let such ripples as these . . . ” the rest of the sentence was drowned in the hooting of the wind, as one of these “ ripples ” swung the boat high in the full face of it, and the “ ripple ”

itself broke into an acre of foam under the boat's bows.

The two sailors sat like logs, ready for the worst ; yet with a supreme confidence in Holdsworth's skill as a steersman, which he had already illustrated in a hundred subtle ways, appreciable to none but them. St. Aubyn lay in the bottom of the boat, motionless. The General, holding on to the mast, was seated amidships, commending his soul, and the souls of his comrades, to God, in inaudible prayers. The widow crouched with her boy, who still slept, in the stern-sheets ; and beside her towered the form of Holdsworth, a yoke-line in each hand, his body inclined forward, his shirt-sleeves rolled above his elbows, every nerve, every muscle in him strung to the tension of steel, his glittering eyes fixed upon the seas ahead, his whole attitude

resembling a sculptured personation of audacity, skill, and the finest British courage.

The dawn broke and found them swinging over an ugly sea, with the wind moderating. As the pallid light spread over the bleak surface of gray and moving waters, the weary shipwrecked men turned their eyes about in search of a vessel; but the ocean was tenantless save by its own leaping seas, which played around in an eternal mockery of a fluctuating hilly horizon.

They were now sailing due south. Holdsworth steered the boat, and Winyard baled her out; but, thanks to the wonderful skill with which the rudder was used, no single sea had been shipped, and what water there was consisted of the spray

that had been blown into the boat off the crests of the waves when she was in their hollows.

The sun rose and diffused an exquisite pink through the ribbed clouds that barred the sky. His glorious light flashed jewels upon the water, and sent a message of hope among the inmates of the tiny boat striving amid the wild and throbbing wilderness of the deep.

The General stood up, and arching his hand over his eyes, gazed slowly and intently around the whole circumference of the water-line.

"We are alone," he said; but instantly corrected himself. "No, I speak thoughtlessly. We have God with us. He has been with us all night. We thank Thee, O God," he murmured, folding his hands and reverently lifting his face to the sky,

“for Thy protection; and we humbly implore Thee not to abandon us, but to be with us in our anguish and desolation, and in Thine own good time to snatch us from the perils that encompass us.”

They all cried Amen! .

“The wind’s lulling, master,” said Johnson to Holdsworth. “We’ll have the sea smooth before long.”

“Oh, Mr. Holdsworth!” exclaimed Mrs. Tennent, starting up suddenly and hurriedly removing his coat from her shoulders, “how cruelly selfish I have been to deprive you of this covering throughout the long cold night.”

“I’m better without it,” cried Holdsworth. “Even my shirt-sleeves were too heavy for me—you see I have had to turn them up. Winyard, rouse up Mr. St. Aubyn. We shall be none the

worse, any of us, for a mouthful of biscuit."

He patted the little boy with his left hand, with his right kept the boat's head straight as a line.

"Come, sir, wake up, please. Biscuit's going to be served out," said Winyard, pulling the actor somewhat unceremoniously by the arm.

Both seamen thought him a white-livered gentleman, and despised him accordingly.

The poor man lay athwart the boat, his legs doubled up and his arms hiding his face. He shook his head, without raising it, when Winyard pulled him, but did not speak. The man, thinking him numbed or cramped, raised him up; whereupon St. Aubyn struggled to his feet, and looked about him with a fixed smile. That smile made his face terrible to behold,

for he was deadly white, and a wild fire, with no more merriment in it than a mad-man's laugh, shone in his eyes, which looked unnaturally large, and his lips were blue and thin, and laid his teeth almost bare.

"You fellows may shrug your shoulders, and some of you may hiss," he muttered, never remitting his fixed smile, but speaking through his teeth and bringing his clenched fist upon his knee, "but you shan't starve me, because you don't understand what true acting means. Do you think I can't tell what this hollowness, this sinking is, here!" laying his hand upon his stomach and sending his lustrous eyes travelling over the others, who watched him in silence. "You are starving me, you fiends, and driving a poor actor to death. But do you think

you will force him into the workhouse ?
No, by God ! He has spirit, and will
seek a new home, a new country, a new
world, rather ! Who tells me I cannot
act ? Try me in farce, in comedy, in
tragedy ! See now — shall I play you
Tony Lumpkin ? ” He began to sing :

“ ‘ Then, come, put the jorum about,
And let us be merry and clever !
Our hearts and our liquor are stout,
Here’s the Three Jolly Pigeons for ever. ’ ”

“ Or shall I give you Lear ? ” He stretched
out his hands to the sea :

“ ‘ Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks ! rage ! blow !
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench’d our steeples, drown’d the
cocks !
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head ! ’ ”

Is not that fine, gentlemen? Now turn about with more shrugs, and drive me mad with your cant. Ha! ha! ha!"

His laughter was shocking. The seamen shrunk away from him.

"He has gone mad with terror!" whispered the General.

The widow hid her face in her hands.

"Johnson," said Holdsworth, "mix some rum and water in that pannikin and give it to him with a biscuit."

The actor took both, staring first at the pannikin, then at the biscuit.

"Gentlemen!" he cried, with his wild smile, "I am Timon of Athens, sour, crusty, and . . ." he stopped with a laugh. "But before his mind went, he pledged his friends, standing, thus: 'Here's to you—dogs!'" He flung the contents of the pannikin at Holdsworth, and dashed

the vessel into the boat; "and with this, I feed the winds!" and he hurled the biscuit into the sea.

"Seize him!" shrieked Holdsworth, noticing a quick movement on the actor's part. The men sprang forward, but too late to catch him. He leaped on to the thwart and bounded overboard with a peal of laughter, ere you could have cried "Hold!" and vanished under the crest of a wave that was breaking at the moment under the boat.

"See!" cried the General; "he has come to the surface! There is his head! He may be saved yet!"

But the boat was foaming through the water at six or seven knots an hour; the sea was still so lively that to broach her to would have been to capsize her in an instant.

“We cannot save him!” exclaimed Holdsworth, bitterly, grasping the situation at once; and kept the boat’s head doggedly away.

Those who watched the drowning man, saw him, a mere dot, on the tumbling waters, heaved high on the summit of a wave, with both his arms upraised; then down he sank into the trough of the sea, the next wave boiled over him, and they beheld him no more.

The General covered his face with his hands and wept aloud. The widow was so sick and faint with the horror of the scene, that she leaned back, white and motionless, with her eyes closed. Johnson came aft and put some rum to her lips, which revived her, and then she began to weep silently, casting shuddering backward glances at the sea, and hugging her boy to

her passionately. She had become, during the night, the very ghost of her former self; her complexion was ashen, her eyes hollow, her countenance gaunt with a hard, weird look of old age upon it. Holdsworth noticed that her dress was wet with salt water and clung to her legs; but this it was impossible to remedy. Infinite pity smote him as he gazed from her to her child, and he handed her a biscuit, entreating her to eat it. The boy ate his allowance quickly; but even out of him something of the youthfulness and freshness of his infancy had passed; a perception of their danger and misery appeared to have visited him; and he clung to his mother's side, holding her dress with one hand whilst he ate the biscuit, and gazing about him with puzzled eyes, in which was mixed up a strong expression of terror.

The impression produced by the sudden and tragical death of the actor was more lasting on the widow and the General than on the sailors, who were too sensible of their own peril to find more than a passing occasion of horror in the scene they had witnessed. They and Holdsworth ate a biscuit apiece and drank their allowance of water mixed with rum ; but the General turned, with an expression of loathing in his face, from the food, and Mrs. Tennent could not be induced to eat more than a few mouthfuls. Both drank of the water.

The waves were still lively enough to demand the utmost care in the steering of the boat ; but Winyard had proved himself a smart steersman, and Holdsworth whose hands were cramped and blue with long grasping of the yoke-lines, gladly surrendered his place to the sailor.

"Strange," muttered the General, "that we sight no ships!"

"Our course is east," said Holdsworth. "If the wind would haul round a few points to the west, I'd out reefs and bear up."

The breeze held until twelve o'clock, when it slackened. The sea having grown smoother during the morning, Holdsworth hauled the sheet of the sail aft and steered south-east by the compass, which was as close to the sea as he deemed it advisable to sail the boat. The sun now shone hot overhead, which greatly comforted Mrs. Tennent and revived the spirits of her boy, who pulled a piece of string from his pocket, to which he fastened a crooked pin, and began to fish. As the afternoon advanced, the wind gradually died away, and a thin haze settled upon the southern

horizon, portending both heat and calm. The water's surface turned to an aspect of polished steel; the boat rose and sank to the swell, easily and with a soothing motion, and the sail flapped idly against the mast.

During the afternoon some porpoises came to the surface of the water, about a stone's throw from the boat, rolling their gleaming black bodies in a southerly direction.

"They always make for the quarter the wind's coming from," said Winyard.

"I am afraid we shall have no wind to-night," answered Holdsworth; "the weather looks too settled."

They watched the fish turning their solemn somersaults until they were out of sight, and then, as though to meet hope half way, Holdsworth swarmed up

the boat's mast and swept the horizon with piercing eyes, but saw nothing but the boundless water - line paling away against the sky.

The sun went down in glorious majesty, burnishing the deep, and dazzling the eye with a splendour of small radiant clouds, pierced with threads of glory, and momentarily changing their brilliant hues until the orb was under the sea, when they turned a bright red colour. The twilight followed fast, the stars came out, and the darkness of night fell upon the lonely deep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE THIRD DAY.

As no object could be served by keeping the sail hoisted, they hauled it down and spread a portion of it over the widow and her child. Holdsworth kept watch till ten, and then awakened Winyard, who watched till twelve; afterwards Johnson watched; and so the three men took turn and turn about, all through the long and breathless night, until daybreak, which found Winyard awake in the stern-sheets, watching the pale dawn breaking in the east.

Its approach at first was imperceptible. A faint gray mingled in the prevailing darkness, and gradually grew more defined ; the stars languished, and those in the extreme east hid themselves. Then a clearer light broke stealthily about the eastern horizon ; the sea caught the glimmering dawn, and mirrored a pale and sickly illumination, infinitely vague, as would be the reflection in a looking-glass of a faint light. But soon the lustre broadened, and streaks of horizontal silver floated above the deep, and stood in layers of crystalline clearness, awaiting a more ardent transformation. Then a delicate pink flushed a wide space in the eastern sky, which spread and spread until the farthestmost heavens shook off the heavy curtains of the night and melted into a pale and visionary blue. Anon,

upon the eastern water-line stood a mere speck of white and exceedingly brilliant light—a pure silver point of glory—which, as the eye watched it, increased in size, flinging flake upon flake of glittering icy splendour upon the water, until, as with a sudden bound, it soared in sun-like shape and flooded the heavens and the sea with strong rejoicing light.

It awoke Holdsworth, who started up and stared around him.

“Look, sir!” said Winyard, in a whisper that sounded fierce with excitement, pointing towards the south-east, where, upon the remote horizon, stood a white speck clearly defined by the sunshine.

Holdsworth hollowed his hands tube-wise, gazed intently for some moments, and then cried, “A sail!”

“Becalmed, master, as we are!” shouted

Winyard; whereat the sleepers in the boat stirred and opened their eyes.

“Out oars, my men!” sang out Holdsworth. “A sail, General! Do you see her? Look, Mrs. Tennent; follow the direction of my finger! She is becalmed! She cannot escape us! Hurrah, my lads!”

In less time than it takes me to write it, both seamen were bending to the oars like madmen, making the water break in clear lines of ripple against the boat’s bows, which headed directly for the distant sail. Language is powerless to describe the excitement of the poor creatures. Mrs. Tennent shed tears; the General, upon whose constitution, debilitated by old age, their perilous situation and the mental sufferings which accompanied it were beginning seriously to tell, stood clutching the mast, his eyes riveted upon the white speck,

and his attenuated face flushed with eagerness and hope. The men, stretching to the long oars, looked from time to time over their shoulders to remark the progress they were making, and encouraged each other with cheerful cries.

They had but two oars, and the boat was heavy and moved reluctantly to the pressure of the blades ; moreover, the men were weakened by exposure and want of nourishing food. Still they urged the boat through the water at pretty nearly three miles an hour ; and Holdsworth repeatedly encouraged them by representing that every stroke of the oars brought the boat nearer within the range of the vision of those on board the vessel, and increased the likelihood, under God's providence, of their rescue.

When the vessel was first sighted, she

could not have been less than ten miles distant; this was made manifest by the circumstance of their continuing to row a full hour before they had exposed her large sails, and even then her hull was invisible. The ocean, meanwhile, remained perfectly polished, without a shadow anywhere upon its vast bosom to indicate the passage of wind.

The seamen presently showing symptoms of distress, Holdsworth took an oar, and bade Winyard, whom he replaced, to drink some rum, and hand a draught to Johnson. The General begged to take Johnson's place for a time while the man rested himself; but the poor old gentleman, after rowing a few strokes, found himself utterly unequal to the weight of the oar, and he returned to his seat covered with perspiration, and breathing with difficulty and pain.

It was seven o'clock by Holdsworth's watch before the hull of the vessel grew discernible; and then Johnson, whose sight was very keen, pronounced her to be a large three-masted brigantine. She had all her sails set, but she was still so remote as scarcely to be distinguished by an inexperienced eye from a cloud.

Winyard, who steered, asked Mrs. Ten-
nent for her black shawl, with which he
climbed up the mast and made it fast, flag-
wise. The motion of the boat hardly
created draught enough to unfurl it; but,
drooping as it did, it could scarcely fail to
serve as a signal. The calm which would
have disheartened them under other circum-
stances, as suspending all prospect of a
rescue whilst it lasted, was now deeply
welcome to them as a guarantee of their
speedy release from the horrors of their

situation. As the vessel grew in dimensions under the desperate exertions of the rowers, Mrs. Tennent became hysterical, laughed and wept at the same moment, and hugged her boy passionately to her. The old General stood up waving his handkerchief, and talking to himself, even wildly at times.

Holdsworth was now steering, and he bent eager glances in search of some signal, some flag whose spot of colour would surely be visible even at that distance, to tell them they were seen.

Suddenly he cried out :

“Johnson — Winyard ! Look ! tell me what you can see ?”

The men rested on their oars simultaneously and turned their heads towards the vessel. A silence ensued, lasting some moments. Then Johnson exclaimed :

"There's smoke coming out of her. Don't you see it, like a blue line between her fore and main-masts?"

"Maybe they're boiling the pitch-kettle abaft the galley, as we used aboard the 'Mary Ann,'" said Winyard, wiping his forehead with his bare arm; "let's make for her, boys."

And he fell to his oar again.

The water rippled round the boat's sides once more, and the shawl at the mast-head fluttered.

Five minutes passed; and then Holdsworth, whose eyes never wandered from the vessel, saw something black pass up her sails, rise over her masts and there hang. Another followed; another yet; volumes now, and each volume denser, blacker than its predecessor.

"She's on fire!" he shouted; at which

the men tilted up their oars and stood up.

Quicker and quicker the black volumes, like balls growing in size as they mounted, were vomited up and resembled an endless series of balloons rising from the deck; they met when they reached a short height above the masts, mingled and formed into a livid line which gradually stretched north and south, but very slowly. The spectators in the boat were paralysed; but their emotions were too various and conflicting to permit the deeper, deadlier ones of disappointment and despair to make themselves felt as yet.

Holdsworth broke a long silence by exclaiming, "Can you see them putting off?"

"No—I see nothing. I reckon she's abandoned hours ago," answered Winyard.

The General sank upon his knees with a

groan, clutching the gunwale and staring at the burning vessel over his knuckles. There was no sign of a boat anywhere—no sign of living creature being on board the doomed craft. The smoke, which appeared to have been pent up in the hold, had now escaped on a sudden; and thick and thicker yet it mounted, marking an ugly stain upon the pure morning sky, and hanging sombre and menacing over the smouldering vessel like a thunder-cloud. Soon a short tongue of flame protruded; then came another and a longer one, which seemed to whiz with a yellow radiance up the rigging and bury itself in the smoke. Then the fire burst out in all directions; in the time it would take you to count ten, the vessel was a mass of flame, keen, brilliant, coiling, with streams of thin blue smoke sailing out of each

yellow ray, mingled with particles of burning matter that winked among the heavy cloud like fireflies in a dark evening. She was four or five miles off; a mere toy on the surface of the sea; and yet those who watched her from the boat could distinctly hear the crackling of the fire, and the seething of her flaming spars as they fell into the water. Anon the fires flickered, and up drove new volumes of smoke, which paled and thinned as the rekindled flames burst forth again and darted their spear-shaped fangs into the smoke-hidden sky.

For half an hour this terrible and magnificent spectacle lasted, during which not a word escaped the lips of the inmates of the boat. Their minds seemed incapable of understanding the extinction of the hope that had sustained them since sunrise, by a catastrophe so unexpected, by a horror

which united the extreme of sublimity with the extreme of misfortune, and which appeared scarcely more than a vision—so unforeseen, so incredible, so illusive, so ghastly, so terrific was it.

By this time the whole of the upper masts were gone, adding fuel to the interior furnace of the hull, and the three lower masts were burning stumps. Suddenly the blazing mass appeared to rise in the air; the fires went out as if by magic, and an opaque cloud, burnished a livid blue by the sunshine, floated on the water. Not for many moments after the flames had vanished came a concussion that rent the air, loud and violent as a thunder-clap among mountains. The cloud lifted, and where the vessel had been the sea was a smooth outline, reflecting only the dark shadow of the slowly-mounting smoke,

and dotted here and there with black remnants of the wreck.

"Mr. Holdsworth," said the General in a faint voice, sinking backwards against a thwart, "I am dying."

His hands were pressed to his heart; he was breathing quickly and convulsively, and his face was bloodless. His exclamation broke the spell that held the others gazing in the direction of the smoke. They turned quickly, and Holdsworth jumped over to the old man and supported his head on his knee.

"No, no, General; don't say that. This is a bitter disappointment; but we believe in God's goodness. He cannot mean that we should perish. Johnson, pour some rum into the pannikin. Mrs. Tennent, dip your handkerchief into the sea and kindly pass it here."

They put the spirit to the old man's lip, and he drank a little, but gasped for breath when he had swallowed it and clenched his hands. They spread the wet handkerchief over his forehead and loosened his cravat.

"I-----I know not what this giddiness may mean," the General stammered, while the lustre faded out of his eyes. "If it is death . . . I am ready to meet it. God is merciful and good. His Son is my Redeemer . . . He will take me to Himself . . . how faint ! how faint ! But I have eaten nothing . . ."

He ceased with a sudden gasp.

"You will feel better presently," said Holdsworth, while Mrs. Tennent took the old man's hand and fanned his face. "The shock of the burning ship has been too great for you. But you will live to recall

the time. To
be sure, I
don't see it
in my mind
to say that
it is a
book.

It is a
book, as
it is a

book
and

fruit on them—just there I fought J. P. Adams, when we were boys . . . he's a senator now, and they tell me a good speaker. Oh, how the time goes!" he sighed wearily. "But there's my wife . . . she is holding the little one by the hand, and nodding to me to attend her. . . A moment, Sarah, a moment! Gentlemen, farewell. I beg your kind word in my favour among your countrymen, whom I honour. I am a plain American gentleman—a general, gentlemen . . . but tell them that my sword was never drawn from its scabbard for any cause but a good one, and . . . Ah, farewell! You see, gentlemen, my wife awaits me, and the little one beckons."

He made a gesture as though he would bow; his venerable and honoured head sank upon his bosom; then he started, looked

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“I wish we could fall in with them, if only for company’s sake,” replied Johnson.

But of that there was very little chance.

All the afternoon the calm lasted, with light mists hanging in wreaths upon the horizon. But about the hour of sunset the smoke that had risen from the burning ship, and which had not drifted more than a couple of miles to the southward throughout the day, came sailing slowly towards the boat and passed high overhead, thinning its bulk as it travelled in an easterly direction. A light breeze heralded it; they hoisted the sail, put the boat’s head round, and stood east-south-east.

The night fell, but the light breeze held steady. When they thought Mrs. Tennent was asleep, they raised the body of the General in their arms from the bottom of

the boat. The night was lustrous with oriental stars, which diffused sufficient light to enable them to see the old man's face. The eyes were closed, and, though the under-jaw was fallen, there yet lingered an expression both of firmness and sweetness about the mouth. The draught under the sail moved his white hairs.

"Mates," said Holdsworth in a whisper, "we pray that God has taken this noble gentleman's soul to Himself, and that, though his body be dispersed in the sea, it will rise again at the Day of Judgment, in the shape we now behold it, to become a partaker of life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The two sailors answered Amen!

All three of them then tenderly handed the body over the boat's side, and let it gently slip into the water. The white

hair glimmered for a brief moment on the dark surface, and then the body sank or was swallowed up in the gloom ; and the boat rippled onwards, cutting the star flakes in the sea with her stem, and leaving them glittering in silver fragments in her wake.

CHAPTER X.

THE FOURTH DAY.

A FOURTH day broke, and found the boat almost becalmed again. The intense tedium of their captivity cannot be expressed by words. The eternal iteration of the water-line became a torment and a pang, and forced them to look into the boat or upon one another for relief of the strained and weary eye. Their limbs were cramped for want of space to stretch themselves. Holdsworth's cheeks were sunk, and the hollows of his eyes dark; and a black beard and moustache, sprouting upon his

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chin and lip, gave him a gaunt and grizzly look. The men sat with rounded backs and hopeless eyes, fixed downwards, and sinewy hands clasped upon their knees.

But the effect of the sufferings, bodily and mental, they were enduring, was most visible in the widow, whose face was scarcely recognisable for the wasted, aged, pallid, and heart-broken aspect that it presented.

When the little boy awoke he began to cry and complain of pains in his limbs and back. His mother seemed too weak to support or even soothe him with speech. Holdsworth took him upon his knee and talked to him cheerfully, that he might inspirit the others as well as himself.

“Louis, you are a little man ; you must not cry, because it grieves your poor mamma, who cannot bear to see your tears.

Your back aches because your bed has been a hard one; but you won't have that uncomfortable bed long. Don't you remember what the poor old General said: that God, whose eye is everywhere, sees us, and will pity us, and send a ship to our rescue if we will but have patience, and not murmur against Him. Many vessels have been wrecked as well as the 'Meteor,' and their crews taken to the boats, and rescued by passing ships, after they had suffered more anguish and misery than we can dream of. The fortune that befell them may befall us. We must put our whole trust in God, and watch the horizon narrowly. This is but our fourth day, and the very breeze that is now blowing may be gradually bearing us towards a ship. So no more tears, my man. Here is a biscuit for you. Give

this one to your mamma. Here, Johnson—Winyard.”

He handed the men a biscuit apiece, and bade Johnson serve out the water.

There were three kegs in the boat, as stated elsewhere. They had calculated that by allowing each person half a pannikin of water a day, their stock would last them ten days. But now there were two mouths less, and they might hope to make the water serve them for as long as thirteen days. It would seem, however, that in spite of the injunctions of Captain Steel, the boats had been provisioned hurriedly. Of biscuit, Holdsworth had an abundance; but nothing but negligence or haste could account for the absence of other provisions, such as rice, flour, beef and pork, dried peas, and such fare; unless, indeed, it was considered that none of these

things would be eatable unless cooked. Though Holdsworth's boat might not have fared the worst, it was manifest that the quantity of water that had been put into her was out of proportion with the biscuit that filled the locker. They had used the water in one of the larger kegs first, and Johnson, in measuring out the allowance, found that scarcely enough remained to fill the pannikin by a quarter. Holdsworth told him to pull the bung out of one of the other kegs, and when the little boy, who was first served, had emptied the pannikin, the next draught was handed to the widow. She raised it to her lips eagerly, her mouth being feverish; but had scarcely sipped it, when she put it down, exclaiming that the water was salt.

"Impossible!" cried Holdsworth quickly, and tasted the water.

The widow was right. The water was not indeed salt, but so brackish as to be quite unfit to drink.

He spat it out at once, his instincts cautioning him that he would increase his thirst by swallowing it, and looked blankly at the men.

"What! is it salt?" exclaimed Winyard furiously.

"Try the other keg," said Holdsworth, throwing the contents of the pannikin away.

Johnson drew some of the water and tasted it, but also spat it out, as Holdsworth had done.

"Is that salt too?" shrieked Holdsworth.

"Try it!" answered Johnson grimly, coming aft with the pannikin.

That, too, like the other, was brackish and unfit to be drunk.

“Great God !” exclaimed Holdsworth, clasping his hands convulsively ; “how could this have happened ?”

“It was the steward as filled these kegs,” said Winyard. “I saw him myself pumping out o’ the starboard water cask, which the sea was washing over when the masts went, and draining the salt water in.” He added fiercely, “I’ll lay he took care to fill the kegs of the boat he belonged to with the right kind !”

“Hand that pannikin here,” said Holdsworth ; and mixed some rum with the water and tasted it, but the dose was indescribably nauseous.

This discovery was a frightful blow ; so overwhelming that it took their minds some minutes to realise it in its full extent.

They were now absolutely without a drop of fresh water in the boat ; which

fact was made the more terrible by the consideration that, up to the moment of discovery, they had believed themselves stocked with sufficient water to last them for another week at the very least.

They were appalled and subdued to images of stone by this last and worst addition to the series of heavy misfortunes that had befallen them.

Then Winyard, who was already tormented with thirst,* for they had permitted themselves to drink no water during the night, began to blaspheme, rolling his eyes wildly and calling curses on the head of the steward for his murderous negligence.

* In his agreeable and instructive little volume, "The Physiology of Common Life," Mr. G. H. Lewes, in speaking of hunger and thirst, justly points out that whereas the first approaches of hunger create a pleasurable sensation (and a good appetite, as it is termed, is certainly this), thirst is always *pain*.

He terrified the boy into a passion of tears, which increased his fury, and he stood up and menaced the child with his outstretched fist.

"Sit down!" exclaimed Holdsworth, in a voice that fell like a blow upon the ear. "You are going mad some days too soon, you lubber! Do you hear me? Sit down!"

The man scowled at him, and then threw himself backwards into the bows of the boat.

"Will your shrieks and oaths give us water?" Holdsworth continued bitterly. "You are not more thirsty than I, nor this poor lady, from whom you have not heard one syllable of complaint since she was handed into the boat!"

He turned to her with a look of deep compassion.

“Try to sustain your courage under this awful trial,” he exclaimed. “Our position is not yet hopeless. There is no sea more largely navigated than the Atlantic, by vessels bound to all parts of the world, and I say it is almost inevitable that we should fall in with a ship soon.”

• She forced a wan smile for answer, but did not speak; merely put her hand on her child's shoulder and drew him to her.

As the morning advanced the heat of the sun increased, and the rays seemed to absorb the light breeze out of the atmosphere; the sea turned glassy, and by noon the boat was becalmed. Meanwhile, Winyard remained doggedly buried in the bows of the boat, sucking his dry lips, with despair legibly written upon his countenance. Johnson appeared to find relief

by plunging his arm in the water and moistening his head and face. The very boat took a white, baked, thirsty aspect; and the heat made the paint upon her exhale in a faint and sickly smell.

When the afternoon was waning, Winyard got up and crept stealthily to the after-part of the boat. Holdsworth kept his eyes steadily upon him. His intention, however, was no more than to take up the pannikin, which he snatched at hastily, as though fearing that his purpose would be frustrated. He then hastened forward and filled the vessel from one of the kegs.

“Don’t drink it!” exclaimed Holdsworth; “it will increase your thirst.”

But the man, pointing to his throat, swallowed the briny draught hastily, then put the pannikin down with a sigh of relief

and with a face cleared of something of its peculiar expression of pain.

Johnson seized the pannikin, meaning to follow Winyard's example. Holdsworth entreated him to desist. "The salt will madden you!" he exclaimed. He had scarcely said this, when Winyard began to roll his body about, uttering short, sharp cries.

Immediately afterwards he vomited, his face turned slate colour, and they thought he would expire. Holdsworth drained some rum into his mouth, and poured sea-water from the pannikin in long streams over his head. This somewhat revived him; but he lay groaning and cursing, and clutching at the sides of the boat with his finger-nails for many minutes.

His sufferings frightened Johnson, who called out :

“Master, if the water in the kegs is poison, we should let it run away.”

“It is worse than poison,” replied Holdsworth. “Pull out the bungs — the seawater around us is as wholesome to drink as that stuff.”

Johnson then turned the kegs over and let them drain themselves empty.

After this a silence fell upon the boat which lasted a full hour, when the boy said :

“Mamma, I am thirsty. Give me something to drink.”

It was shocking to hear the child's complaint, and feel the *impossibility* of satisfying him. The mother started up with a wild gesture, and cried in a fierce whisper,

that was thickened in its passage through her swollen throat:

“Oh my God! let us both die! End our misery now.”

Holdsworth watched her mutely.

Her appeal died away, and she sank back, exhausted by the sudden outbreak.

The sun went down and some clouds came up behind the horizon to receive the glowing disc. These spread themselves slowly over the heavens, albeit the sea remained breathlessly calm; and thinking that the wind was coming up that way, the poor sufferers turned their eyes wildly and eagerly towards the west, hoping with a desolate hope for the vessel that was to rescue them, but which no day brought.

When the night fell, Winyard began to sing in a strange husky voice; but his tones soon died out, and then came the

small weak cry of, "Mamma, I am thirsty! give me some water!" from the little boy, wounding the ear with an edge of agony in the stillness and the gloom.

Presently a soft sigh of wind came from the west, which backed the sail. Holdsworth put the boat's head round until the sail filled, and then hauled the sheet aft, meaning to lay close to the wind, that they might sooner encounter the ship that the wind was to bring. The air sunk into a calm again; but another puff followed which made the water gurgle, and it was plain that a breeze was coming, by the clouds which were drifting eastwards. The wind freshened and then became steady, and the boat, bending to the weight of the full sail, stirred the water into fire, which flashed and vanished in her wake.

It mattered little which way Holdsworth

steered the boat; but let him head her as he would, there was always the haunting sense upon him that he was speeding away from the ship that would rescue them; that by pointing yonder, or yonder, or yonder, a vessel would be encountered. The breeze and the movement of the boat revived Winyard, who lolled over on the lee side, finding relief in letting his hands trail through the water. The boy had ceased his complaints, and lay sleeping along the thwart, with his head on his mother's knee. Johnson also slept.

The thirst that had tormented Holdsworth during the afternoon had now in some measure abated. There were four or five bottles of rum still left in the stern locker, and, hoping to hit upon some means to deal with the sufferings with which they were threatened by the absence

of water, he soaked a piece of biscuit in the spirit and tasted it. But he at once perceived that no relief was to be obtained by this expedient, but that, on the contrary, the spirit would irritate the throat and increase the dryness. He threw the piece of biscuit away, and began to think over all the stories he had ever heard of men who had suffered from thirst in boats at sea, that he might recollect any one way they adopted for diminishing their torments. He had been shipmates with a man, in one of his earlier voyages, who, together with three other men, had been miraculously rescued by a vessel, after they had been at sea in an open boat exactly twenty-one days, during which they had drifted above seven hundred miles from the spot at which their ship had gone down. Holdsworth could

only remember two of the expedients they resorted to when maddened with hunger and thirst: one was, tearing off pieces of their shirts and chewing them; the other, cutting wounds in their arms and sucking the blood.* This last was a remedy from which he recoiled with horror; nor were his sufferings so great just then as to tempt him to try the other.

"Master!" called out Winyard, in a husky voice, "what longitude do you reckon we're in?"

"We were in twenty-eight West when the ship went down, and I doubt if we

* In the case of the wreck of the "Thomas," the men soaked their shoes and two hairy caps in the water, and devoured them. "Another expedient," says the narrative of the wreck of the "Juno," "we had frequent recourse to, finding it supplied our mouths with temporary moisture, was, chewing any substance we could find, generally a bit of canvas, or even lead."

are many miles distant from the same place."

"Ain't there no chance of our sighting a ship, master?"

"Yes, every chance."

"I reckon the skipper has run the long-boat into the regular tracks by this time," grumbled the man; "it's cursed hard upon us that we should be left to die here like dogs."

To this Holdsworth made no answer, and Winyard, after muttering awhile to himself, began to splash the water in his face by scooping it out with his hand. Then Johnson, in his sleep, called out for something to drink, on which Winyard, with an oath, answered, "Ay, you may call out! If calling 'ud bring it, I'd raise the shop, I'll lay!"

The clouds overhead, though widely

sundered one from another, were heavy, and Holdsworth constantly directed his weary eyes at them, praying for a shower of rain. At midnight, or thereabouts, Johnson was awakened, and came aft to relieve Holdsworth at the helm. The two men whispered together about Winyard, saying that he was not to be trusted with the management of the boat whilst the breeze held; and it was agreed that Holdsworth should replace Johnson at the expiration of two hours, by the watch, which Johnson took and put in his pocket. But before lying down, Holdsworth dipped the sail and put the boat around. Her head on the port tack was north-west and by north.

“Keep a sharp look-out to windward, Johnson, and call me at once if you sight anything,” said Holdsworth; then packed

himself against the mast and fell into a doze.

When he was asleep, Winyard came out of the bows, and stepped to the stern-sheets and began to talk to Johnson. After awhile, he said he should like to see what quantity of biscuit they still had, and lifted the seat over the locker. Johnson, who suspected nothing, had his eyes fixed on the weather horizon ; and Winyard, snatching at a bottle of rum, thrust it cunningly into his bosom, and hurried forward.

All this time the boy was sleeping ; but it was impossible to tell whether his mother slumbered or not. She never once stirred. She sat on the weather side, close against Johnson. Her child's head was upon her knee, and her hands were clasped

upon his shoulder. She kept her face bowed, her chin upon her breast.

At two o'clock by the watch, Johnson called Holdsworth, who instantly sat upright, and before rising, bent his head under the foot of the sail to take a look to leeward. He had scarcely done this when he uttered a cry, and then fell dumb, pointing like a madman. Johnson leaned sideways, and saw the outline of a large ship, about a mile distant, running with the wind free on her starboard quarter.

"Put your helm up! Head for her!" gasped Holdsworth, springing aft; and then as the boat swept round, he jumped on to a thwart, and hollowing his hands, shouted, but his shout was feeble and hoarse; the constricted throat dulled and

choked his voice. Johnson also shouted, but his voice was even weaker than Holdsworth's.

"They will not leave us! they will not leave us!" shrieked Mrs. Tennent, rising suddenly and extending her hands towards the ship, which the movement of the boat's rudder had brought on the starboard-beam.

As she cried, Winyard stood up in the boat's bows, reeling wildly, and mad with the drink he had abstracted. His gestures and fury were horrible to witness. His husky screeches sounded as the voice of one suffering indescribable torment. He brandished his arms towards the ship, which was drawing ahead rapidly, and in his drunken excitement leaped upon the gunwale of the boat, where he stood balancing

himself, and tossing his clenched fists above his head. Just then the boat dipped and sunk into the hollow of a swell; the drunken madman made a grab at the leech of the sail to steady himself—missed it—and went head backwards overboard.

Holdsworth bounded aft to catch him as he floated past; but he remained under water until the boat was some yards ahead; and then they could hear his bubbling cries and the splashing of his arms.

Holdsworth's first instinct was to bring the boat round; but Johnson divined his intention, and twirling the yoke-lines furiously around his hands, cried:

"No! no! we can't save him! he'll have sunk before we can reach him! Let's follow the ship—she may see us!" And

he bawled "Ahoy! ahoy!" but his hoarse voice fainted in his throat.

Holdsworth grasped one of the yoke-lines, and there was a short struggle. The boat's head yawed wildly. But by this time nothing was to be heard astern but the wash of the water as the boat sucked it into eddies.

Holdsworth let go the yoke-line, sprang forward and dipped the sail clear of the mast; crying that there were four lives to be saved, and it would be as bad as murder to stop the boat now.

The ship was distinctly visible on the port bow, every sail on her standing in a clean black outline against the sky. She showed no lights, and further than that she was a full-rigged ship, it was impossible to tell what she resembled. They watched

her with wild despair, utterly powerless to attract her attention, and dependent upon the faint possibility of their glimmering sail being distinguishable on the black surface of the water. If the wind would only lull now, if such a calm as that which had held them motionless the day before would fall, their rescue was inevitable. But the light breeze remained steady, and the ship ahead slipped forward nimbly, and became soon a square shadow against the winking stars over the horizon.

How horrible to be abandoned for lack of means to make their presence known ! Any kind of light would have served them.

The widow moaned and beat her breast as the vessel faded into the darkness ;

Johnson flung himself doggedly down, and sat resting his elbow on his knee, gnawing his finger-nails; whilst Holdsworth stood upright forward, gazing with wild, passionate, intense despair, in the direction of the ship long after she had vanished.

There could be little doubt that, had Johnson kept a proper look-out, he would have seen the ship in time to put his helm up, and run within easy hail of her. Holdsworth knew this, but would not increase the misery of their situation by useless reproaches.

The child, who had been awakened by their cries, now that silence had fallen, began to ask eagerly and importunately for water, and even reproached his mother for not attending to him.

“ I am hot — hot ! ” he petitioned.
“ Mamma, give me water.”

Once during his appeals she started up and glared about her, as if there *must* be some means of relieving his sufferings; and then crying, “ I shall go mad ! ” fell back with a low, heart-broken sob, and spoke no more, though the child persisted in his entreaties for a long while. Finally he burst into tears, and after plucking at his throat for a time, sank into an uneasy slumber, in which he uttered low moaning cries repeatedly.

A stupor now fell upon Holdsworth—a species of drowsy indifference to his fate and to the fate of his companions. He had fallen wearily upon a thwart and sat with his back against the mast, and visions began to float before him, and his whole

physical being seemed lapped into a dreamy insensibility, that subdued, whilst it lasted, that subtle agonising craving for water which, since he was awakened from his sleep, had tormented him with a pang more exquisite than any other form of human suffering. He fought with the dangerous listlessness for some time, terrified at without understanding its import; but in spite of him, his mind wandered, and he presently thought that Dolly was at his side; whereupon he addressed her, and seemed to receive her answers, and asked her questions in a low, strange voice, often smiling as though the light of her eyes were upon his face and his arm around her.

His language was audible and intelligible; but Johnson, with one of the yoke-lines

over his knees, his head supported in his hands, paid no more heed to him than to the flapping of the sail as the boat sometimes broached to ; which insensibility was as shocking as the other's delirious chattering.

END OF VOL. I.

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